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OTTERSTONE HALL.

OTTERSTONE HALL.

BY

URQUHART A. FORBES.

VOLUME I.

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To the Memory of

EDWARD THROCKMORTON,

THESE REMINISCENCES OF BYGONE DAYS ARE

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY

THE EDITOR.

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OTTERSTONE HALL.

CHAPTER I.

Introduces two of the Chief Personages of this History to each other, and to the reader.

Who quarrel more than beggars? Who does more earnestly long for a change than he that is uneasy in his present circumstances? And who run to create confusions with so desperate a boldness as those who, having nothing to lose, hope to gain by them?—SIR T. MOORE.

THE year 1848 will ever be memorable in history for the revolutionary movements which then convulsed Europe, in some cases destroying thrones, and in many instances causing changes in dynasties and the remodelling of constitutions. The objects of their promoters were nearly everywhere identical. The more moderate demanded liberty of the press, trial by jury, State education, and the free right of holding public meetings; while the extreme party clamoured for universal suffrage, the abolition of standing armies, and the protection of labour, with a guarantee for the supply of all the necessaries of life.

In Great Britain alone, in spite of an unsuccessful Irish Rebellion and the abortive and foolish agitation of the Chartists, the monarchy not only stood firm amid the tempest, but even seemed to acquire additional strength

from troubles which on the continent threatened to subvert the whole fabric of society.

Of these France was the chief sufferer, but the national movement, as it was termed, also assumed very serious proportions in most of the States forming the German Empire. The Grand Duchy of Baden, the Rhenish Provinces, Nassau, Hesse-Cassel, and Bavaria, as well as Hanover and Saxony, were all in turn the scene of insurrections more or less successful which received support, not only from turbulent enthusiasts, but also from all the desperate characters whom crime had banished from society. Bands recruited from these sources were formed by two Democratic leaders named Hecker and Struve, who roamed the country, plundering, murdering, and everywhere inspiring terror by the lawless deeds they committed under pretence of aiding the cause of liberty, till, after for some time successfully resisting the troops of the German Diet, they were finally defeated at the heights of Scheltenau near Raudern.

As the year went on, however, the disturbing elements began to show signs of settling. In some cases rulers satisfied by timely concessions insurgents who had often fair grounds for complaint, in others the mere appearance of troops sufficed to disperse the rebels and restore order. Moreover, both rulers and people had begun to long for some form of government which would more closely unite the component parts of the vast German Empire, and on the 18th May the first German National Assembly met at Frankfort under the presidency of Von Gagen and Von Soiron, and established a Provisional Central Power for the administration of the whole Empire which they entrusted to John, Archduke of Austria, and uncle of the Emperor Ferdinand, as Regent. He was solemnly

installed in this office at Frankfort on the 12th July, but it was destined that before his government was finally assured, the smouldering embers of rebellion should once more burst into flame and threaten its subversion.

A majority of the Assembly had on the 5th of September resolved not to ratify an armistice which had been concluded at Malmö between the Danes and the Prussians, who were then at war. The ministry of the Regent had therefore been driven to resign, and it was only with difficulty that he succeeded in forming a fresh one. The violent conduct, however, of the Schleswig-Holstein Duchies, which in a combined Assembly rejected the new Provisional Government and voted themselves independent, considerably modified the opinion of the German Parliament, and led that body, after a stormy debate, to reverse its former decision and ratify the obnoxious armistice. This determination raised to the highest pitch the fury of the Radicals and of the war party, who lost no time in appealing to the passions of the mob in order to overawe the Assembly, if possible, by a display of popular violence. The Democratic leaders harangued the mob from balconies in the streets, and monster meetings were held outside the town, at one of which it was voted that:—‘The members who had ratified the infamous armistice of Mälmo were guilty of high treason against the majesty, liberty, and honour of the German People,’ and that the ‘German People’ and the Assembly should be informed of this resolution. The Senate now officially announced to the Regent that they could no longer preserve the peace of the town, and in the emergency he persuaded Herr Von Schmerling, who had but lately resigned, to resume office provisionally.

This minister, a man of courage and energy, immediately ordered detachments of Austrian, Prussian, and Bavarian troops to march into the town, and prepared to enforce the cause of law and order, while the insurgents on their part took equally prompt measures for carrying out their views.

Such was the state of affairs in Frankfort on the morning of the 18th September when a tall black-bearded man knocked at the door of one of the houses in a quiet square not far from the Saalhof. The fierce restlessness of his strongly-marked Jewish features was strangely in contrast with the quiet of the spot on this still bright autumn day. The old-fashioned houses with their latticed windows and huge gables, and those in the narrow lane leading to the quay of which the upper stories almost met, were all so silent that anyone coming from the more frequented thoroughfares might think that he had passed into a deserted city. The place seemed abandoned to the sparrows inhabiting the three dusty-leaved elm trees in the centre, and to the swallows who had built under the eaves of the houses, and were incessantly darting to and fro in the sunshine. The soothing effect of the surroundings did not, however, at all seem to influence him. Seeing that his first summons produced no effect, he knocked again more loudly, but it was not till he had repeated the process a third time, with many imprecations, that the door was slowly opened by a tall, handsome young girl of between nineteen and twenty.

‘Himmel! what a time you take!’ cried the man angrily as he followed her down a long dark passage; ‘Were you asleep or what?’

‘I did not know who it could be who knocked so

noisily,' replied the girl. 'Where is Theodore?' she added anxiously.

'Theodore ! Donnerwetter ! I am parched with thirst, and my throat nearly raw with dust and shouting ! you must get me some wine.'

'Your thirst is always the same whatever the condition of your throat may be,' said the girl with a scornful laugh as they ascended a narrow stairway and entered a large room on the second floor. An old man, spare, small, and with rather a weak expression of countenance, who was clad in the long dressing-gown which the Germans so much affect, was pacing up and down in deep thought. He held a cup of coffee in one hand and a rusk in the other, and muttering to himself, partook in turn of each, scarcely noticing the entrance of the pair.

'It is Herr Reuben, father,' said the girl, motioning the other to be seated, and placing before him a glass and a bottle of wine, from which he immediately helped himself.

'Ah ! Herr Reuben !' cried the old man with a little flutter of alarm, plunging his rusk into his cup, and bowing profoundly, 'I commend myself to you Herr Reuben ! I am much rejoiced at this visit ! Permit me to show you what I have received this morning from Düsseldorf. Frederica, get Herr Reuben some refreshment,' and he hurriedly set down his cup, and after fumbling nervously in his pocket, handed to Herr Reuben a geological specimen, with many comments on its beauty.

'It is very fine,' replied the latter, glancing at it impatiently and throwing it on to the table. 'But I have no time for such things, Herr Professor, for such trifles you understand. The cause demands that I should to work and at once.'

‘Work!’ said the Professor, only half-catching what he said. ‘Ah yes! my work on the “Geology of South Germany” is nearing its completion, and then Herr Reuben, by its sale I may hope that my debt to you’—

‘Psha,’ said Reuben contemptuously, cutting him short, ‘do not bother now about that, old man! Have I not my security,’ and he leered affectionately at Frederica, who however steadily avoided meeting his eyes. ‘No! I spoke of the great work! the cause of Liberty! Ah! we have done great things to-day, and we shall do more!’

‘To be sure! To be sure!’ said the old man timidly. ‘What then has happened, my good Herr Reuben?’

‘And where is Theodore?’ enquired Frederica.

‘Theodore! Theodore! It is always Theodore with you, girl!’ cried Reuben, angrily. ‘I tell you I will not allow it!’

‘You!’ replied the girl fiercely, ‘you have no right to allow or disallow what I choose.’

‘Beware how you raise my jealousy, Frederica,’ said Reuben, with a look so savage that she quailed before it.

‘You know you have no cause for jealousy, Reuben,’ said she softly, giving him a glance that at once seemed to mollify his anger. ‘You know that on the leaders depends much of the success of the cause. We cannot spare our best leaders, such as you and Theodore.’

Herr Reuben gave a grunt of satisfaction, and fastened his eyes on her with an almost repulsive expression of coarse admiration.

Frederica’s was a face that could not fail to rivet attention. The finely-shaped head, the low, broad forehead and regular features, and the contrast of the jet black hair with the beautifully clear pale complexion

made up an *ensemble* which at once commanded admiration. But what most struck an observer were the large dark eyes, which seemed formed to express changes of mood to which the repose of the rest of the countenance afforded no index,—now blazing fiercely as when her freedom of opinion was challenged, and as easily melting into tenderness when she desired to appease Herr Reuben. She rose, and leading the Professor, who looked somewhat scared at this passage of arms, to a chair, she placed his breakfast before him, and begged him affectionately to continue it while Herr Reuben should tell them the news.

‘News! I promise you it is good!’ said the latter. ‘Before evening the city will be ours. I went first to the Church of St. Paul’s, where the Assembly is, to learn how things were going on. Himmel! we Democrats had our way, I tell you! Von Schmerling even could not obtain a hearing. One after another the speakers of our party rose and denounced this villainous armistice and this tyranny of a government, till the meeting had to be dissolved. Theodore and I had already summoned the brethren, and as the traitors left the church we raised such a hissing and hooting, and threw so much mud, that they will not soon forget that walk!’

‘Ei! Ei! This sounds serious,’ cried the Professor. ‘It is alarming! terrible! But yet it is good! of course it is good!’ he added nervously, as he saw a shade of anger pass over Reuben’s face.

‘The troops were gathered round to try and over-awe us,’ went on Reuben. ‘Some of them hustled our brave fellows. “Give them a volley, my men,” cried Theodore, and at the words they got such a storm of stones

that they were thrown into confusion, and some fell. Hein ! It was glorious ! They shall be taught that the sovereign people will not submit to be trampled upon. They charged us, the cowards ! so we dispersed, every man to get his weapons. Our main rallying point is the Constabler Wache, which we have already seized and fortified.'

'Fortified ! then it is war ! civil war !' cried the Professor, wringing his hands. 'My God ! it is terrible ! yes, terrible !'

'Aye it is war !' cried Reuben ; 'war for the cause of liberty and the regeneration of society ! Society is diseased. It needs a sharp knife to remove the ulcer ! Yes it is war ! The city has been declared in a state of siege, and fresh troops are entering. But everywhere our barracades are ready. At the Römerberg, the Döngesgasse, the Schnurgasse, and by the Exchange. Every lane and alley is full of our sharpshooters. I tell you, we are irresistible.'

The Professor wrung his hands in mute despair.

'Do not fear, old man !' cried Reuben, grandiloquently. 'This house is sacred to the brethren. I Reuben Pfeiffer have said so ! No one will dare to touch it. The square itself will be free from conflict. You are quite safe if you stay within. Mark me, Frederica, thou must not stir from the house. Mark.'

The conversation and furious gesticulations of the speaker were here both interrupted by a loud knocking below.

'Tis Theodore !' cried Frederica, starting from her seat, and going down quickly to open the door. She soon returned, followed by two men, the younger of whom had a blood-stained handkerchief bound round

his head. He was rather above the middle height, fair, blue-eyed, and with a remarkably amiable, though somewhat weak, expression of countenance. He sank into a chair, apparently exhausted.

‘Hey, Frederica! Bring water, please, quickly!’ cried his companion. ‘The young man is hurt. He has saved my life. Quick! the wine there, Reuben!’

‘And you have saved mine,’ replied the other, in a pleasant voice, and in very indifferent German.

‘Saved thy life, Theodore!’ cried Frederica, with a tender look, hurrying for the water.

‘Yes, that he did,’ answered he. Standing over six feet in height, with a figure framed in proportion, Theodore was as fine a specimen of his countrymen as could well be met with. He had a mass of curly, dark, reddish brown hair, rather light hazel eyes, and a florid complexion. Good-looking, rather than handsome, his square cut chin and firmly-set lips denoted energy and resolution, redeeming his face from the recklessness which was its characteristic expression. His age must have been about five-and-thirty.

‘Who is this foreigner? Why do you bring him here at such a time?’ asked Reuben, somewhat fiercely. He had noted the looks exchanged between Frederica and Theodore with evident displeasure, and was regarding the wounded man with a gaze the reverse of kindly.

‘I repeat, he saved my life,’ replied Theodore, quietly disregarding his comrade’s anger. ‘One of these accursed soldiers, a Major Auerswald, would have cut me down, when this young English mister, who was riding with him, seized his arm, asking him to spare me, and turned the blow. The second volley of stones knocked the poor boy off his

horse, and the brethren would have made short work of him had I not rescued him. Drink this,' he added, handing a glass of wine to the Englishman.

'Thank you,' said the latter. 'My name is Chessington,' added he, turning apologetically to the fierce Reuben. 'I am sorry to intrude on you at such a time; but I could not quite help it you see. Pray excuse me.'

He spoke so politely, in such imperfect German, and there was a boyish, good-tempered air about him so ludicrously in contrast to the anger of Reuben, who stood glowering at him in astonishment, that Theodore and Frederica both laughed outright, and at last even the grim features of Reuben relaxed into a smile of pitying contempt.

'Himmel boy! this is no drawing-room!' cried Theodore, 'you are among republican socialists, children of the people, who do not care for politeness! never mind though. I owe you a good turn, and Theodore Hoffbauer never forgets a kindness. I speak your English too, boy, a little. I have some English blood in me. Do not fright thyself therefore,' he added, in the latter language.

Frederica had knelt down beside the young man and removed the bandage, and was bathing a deep, though not dangerous wound in the temple, evidently made by a stone. 'You will soon be better,' said she kindly.

Reuben Pfeiffer, however, did not view the matter in such a pleasant light.

'How Hoffbauer!' cried he, 'you would let this young foreign aristocrat go free—doubtless to give information to imperil our safety and endanger the cause! I will not suffer this! He must die! or at least remain a prisoner,

till the brethren have pronounced sentence on him !' and he drew a pistol from his belt.

'Fool !' said Theodore Hoffbauer, placing his big body between the Englishman and the angry speaker, 'Fool ! Put back your pistol ! Do you fear such as this ? I tell you he is an English gentleman—a milord. I will answer for him ; you will not help the cause by shooting influential foreigners. Do you doubt, pray, that I care for the cause ? Have you known me ever false ? Did I fail at Scheltenau ?'

At the mention of Scheltenau, Herr Reuben changed colour, for he had, to tell the truth, rather speedily left the field of battle on that occasion, no doubt considering that the 'cause' would be best served if its valuable leaders were safe. Though, however, evidently overawed by Hoffbauer, his blood was up, and he was about to make an angry reply, when the noise of drums and trumpets, mingled with the dull hoarse roar of many voices, made all pause. A minute after, loud knocks were heard at the door below, and cries of 'Hoffbauer !' 'Reuben !' made the two men hurriedly prepare to join their companions.

'Look after the young Englander, Liebchen !' said Hoffbauer, lingering behind his companion ; and, in spite of an angry protest from the latter, he embraced the young girl tenderly. Then the pair rushed down the stairs, the street door closed with a bang, and Walter Chessington found himself alone with a handsome female socialist, and an apparently half idiotic old man, for the Professor had sat as if stupified in his chair during the whole of these proceedings.

For a young Englishman who had but a slight acquaintance with German, the situation was rather an

awkward one ; and when it is considered that he was wounded, and weak from loss of blood, and that his way back to the Hotel Russie lay between two conflicting hosts, it will be owned that it was not altogether devoid of peril.

Chessington, a gentleman of good family and the heir to a considerable property, had been travelling for his amusement on the continent, but was now, at the desire of his father, returning to England by easy stages from Heidelberg, where for the last two months he had been reading at the University. His interest in the state of affairs had induced him to linger some days at Frankfort, where he had made several acquaintances, and among others that of Major von Auerswald, with whom he had been riding when the adventure just narrated had occurred. He had been led to intercede for Hoffbauer with the major, both by his appearance and bearing, which made a very favourable impression on him, and also by the fact that his English instincts revolted at the idea of a soldier striking an unarmed man. This sudden impulse of generosity had certainly brought him into strange quarters, and as he had a strong sense of humour he could not help feeling somewhat amused at the ludicrous aspect of the position in which he found himself.

He now felt sufficiently recovered to be able to walk to his hotel, and began to consider how he could best manage his departure.

Frederica was apparently absorbed in a reverie, and the Professor was absently contemplating his geological specimen.

‘That is a piece of *mica*, sir, I think ; is it not ?’ said Chessington, wondering how such a quiet, inoffensive

personage had got mixed up with men like Reuben and Hoffbauer.

‘Ah! It is beautiful, is it not?’ replied the Professor brightening up suddenly and handing it to him. ‘Come with me,’ he added, barely giving him time to look at it. ‘Come! I will show you more,’ and, without waiting for an answer, he took the young man by the hand and led him to the further end of the room, which was full of cabinets ranged round the walls and in the centre, after the manner of a museum.

‘My father is a professor of geology,’ said Frederica, who, aroused from her day dream by the sound of her father’s voice, rose and followed them. ‘His collection is considered very fine. He thinks of nothing else.’

‘So I see,’ replied Chessington, half amused. ‘It is certainly very beautiful,’ said he after the Professor had led him to each cabinet in turn, and explained and dilated on its contents.

‘Ach Himmel!’ cried the Professor, ‘it is beautiful indeed!’ and he took Chessington by one hand, and his daughter by the other, and, standing in the centre of the room, repeated three or four times, with tears in his eyes, ‘It is very beautiful, very beautiful; ah! it is magnificent!’

While they stood thus, as if the lady was about to be formally betrothed to Chessington, who, scarcely able to restrain his laughter at the absurd situation, yet felt a kindly pity for the old enthusiast, the sharp rattle of musketry rang through the air.

‘Heavens! the fighting has begun!’ cried Frederica, and her face, which had, during the Professor’s eulogium, presented an odd mixture of shame and mirth, turned deadly white. She ran to the window, while her father,

quite overcome, tottered to a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, muttered—‘Terrible! terrible!’

‘The troops are attacking the barricades, I suppose,’ said Chessington to Frederica.

‘Yes,’ replied she. ‘Ah! it is very terrible! Why do they always like to shed blood, these cruel men! Come with me,’ she added, ‘I will take you to a place whence we can see everything. Come, my father is best left alone just now. His studies have unnerved him. We are quite safe here whatever happens.’

‘May I ask you the name of the man who saved my life?’ enquired Chessington as he followed her half mechanically up a narrow stairway that led to the roof of the house.

‘Theodore Hoffbauer,’ replied she, ‘and the other is Reuben Pfeiffer.’

‘And your own name, if you will not think me impolite?’

‘Frederica Schroeder is my name. My father is Professor Schroeder.’

‘And you live here alone with him?’

‘Yes; alone. We used to live at Heidelberg, where my father had a post till my mother died. She was Italian.’

‘And they are only your friends, then, these two, not related in any way? You will excuse my curiosity.’

‘Oh! certainly I will excuse your curiosity,’ said she, turning on him a rather defiant look, ‘though I don’t see how it will benefit you. Yes, they are only friends, no relations. They are friends of my father’s and mine. They have espoused the cause of liberty, and so have I. We are striving for the regeneration of society.’

Walter Chessington was about to enquire of this strange

young girl what the term 'regeneration of society' comprised, when she opened a door which admitted them to the roof, and they found themselves looking down on the scene which soon made them forget everything else.

In all the principal streets of the city the insurgents had torn up the pavement and erected barricades composed of packing cases filled with stones and rubbish, and one near the Exchange was crowned with a sort of creviced and loopholed battlement, while omnibuses and carriages had been dragged in front to still further strengthen it. A detachment of Prussian soldiers had been placed round the Parliament House to protect it, while another body of troops had been despatched against a barricade in the Zeil, a broad, open thoroughfare exposed to the fire of the rebels occupying all the lanes and alleys opening on to it, as well as to that of those who had taken possession of the Constabler Wache, a fortified guard house. A third was moving down on a formidable barricade in the Döngesgasse, the street nearest to Chessington, and his companion, who watched the scene with feelings of mingled interest and horror, while the thick smoke, illumined by occasional flashes of musketry, and the hoarse shouts of the soldiers and insurgents, blended with the shrieks and groans of the wounded, made the scene seem like some horrible picture of pandemonium. They saw a body of Austrian troops advance to attack the barricade over which a large red flag floated in triumph. They charged gallantly forward, evidently intending to take it by storm and without firing, but ere they could reach it a heavy well-directed volley from its defenders threw them into confusion, and a young officer who had dashed forward in front of his men to try and seize the Republican banner threw up his arms with

a wild cry and fell backward shot through the heart. A shout of exultation rose from the barricade, but as the Austrians slowly retired, leaving many of their comrades dead, a Prussian regiment, which had been advanced in support, opened its ranks to give a passage to the retreating troops and quickly re-formed amid an ominous silence. They moved forward steadily till within range of the barricade, when the order to fire was given, and they poured a deadly volley upon the insurgents. They were met with one equally destructive and the advancing mass seemed for a moment to waver. Then the voices of the officers were heard rallying their men with cries of encouragement or fierce imprecations, the gaps were quickly filled up, and the regiment continued to advance firing, till presently the two spectators heard a great shout as the whole line, with levelled bayonets, rushed on to the barricade. There was a brief struggle, and then the insurgents were seen flying in every direction, their defences had been carried, and the victorious troops passed on to join their comrades in the Zeil.

‘Ah! they have been beaten!’ cried Frederica with clasped hands, ‘But, thank heaven, he is not there!’

‘Who?’ asked Chessington, turning towards her in some surprise. He had become so absorbed in the sight he was watching that he had for the moment quite forgotten her existence.

‘Theodore, of course,’ replied the girl. She was still very pale, and her eyes wore a haggard, anxious look, but she seemed perfectly composed. ‘He is in the Constabler Wache. It is the post of danger, and he always leads where there is most danger.’

‘And your other friend?’ enquired Chessington.

‘Friend, indeed!’ said she scornfully.

‘You spoke of him as such, just now,’ replied he.

‘Ah! it is true,’ said she with a sigh. ‘I am forced to call him friend, because I dare not call him enemy. We are in his power, my poor father and I! He was there,’ pointing to the now deserted barricade in the Döngesgasse, ‘but doubtless he saved himself long before the troops charged.’

‘And you don’t much care where he is now!’

She made no answer save by a significant look, and he was about to enquire how she and her father had managed to make the acquaintance of such strange friends when they were startled by hearing a peculiar whistle from some one below, followed by a knock at the door, repeated twice.

Frederica’s face flushed scarlet. ‘That is Reuben!’ she cried passionately. ‘The coward! he has skulked away as usual!’ ‘While Theodore is risking his life! That is what he has always done—always! I am sure that more than once he has betrayed his comrades for money! I am sure of it; but Theodore will not believe it! The coward traitor! Oh! if I could be a man!’

Chessington felt rather glad that she was not, as he saw the savage light in her eyes, her clenched hands, and her whole form trembling with suppressed anger.

‘What will you do,’ he asked.

‘I must admit him,’ replied she; ‘but you! I promised Theodore I would help you! You must not remain here. He would murder you for the sake of the cause; and for your watch and money,’ she added, scornfully.

‘What can I do?’ enquired the young man rather

anxiously. He had plenty of courage, but was unarmed, and still felt the effects of his wound.

‘I dare not take you into the house. Reuben is sure to come up here to try and see how matters are going on,’ replied she in some perplexity. ‘Stay! I will take you into the little yard at the back. If you can manage to scramble over the wall you will find yourself in a lane leading to the quay. All is quiet there, and you will be safe. Then if you can find your way to the soldiers you will be out of danger, will you not? What do you think?’

‘I will try, at all events,’ answered he, and Frederica, without more ado, led the way down stairs, and softly opening a door, showed him a small yard surrounded on three sides by houses, and on the fourth by a low wall which shut it off from the lane.

‘Do not begin to climb till you hear me cough,’ whispered she. ‘I shall take him up to the sitting-room, and must pass this door. He is sure to want wine as usual, the brute! I will cough as I pass, and then you will know all is safe.’

‘Are you not afraid to be left alone with this man?’ asked Chessington in the same low tone, feeling half ashamed of leaving an old man and a young girl to the mercy of such a character as Reuben.

‘Afraid!’ said Frederica, scornfully. ‘He is an arrant coward at heart, and besides, he worships me! I can manage him. If it come to the worst I have these,’ and she showed him a small pistol and a dagger in a silver sheath. ‘They were given by Theodore,’ added she, with a sigh. ‘Do not fear for me. I know how to use them.’

‘Well, I give you my best thanks for your help and

kindness, Fraulein,' said he, after a pause, with a strange feeling of interest in his fair deliverer. 'I owe my life this day to you—to you and to Theodore Hoffbauer, and I shall never forget it. See, here is my address in England. If you ever should come there and stand in need of a friend come to me. I do not suppose we are likely to meet again, but if we do I shall remember my debt.'

Frederica thanked him and put the card carefully in her pocket; then, with a little laugh accepting the English shake of the hand which he proffered, she closed the door quietly, and left him. He listened intently, and in a few minutes heard footsteps coming down the passage, and the loud harsh voice of Reuben apparently in angry altercation with his companion. Then he heard Frederica cough, and knew that he must set about making his escape. For a moment he hesitated as to whether after all he ought to leave the Professor and his daughter alone with Reuben, but he decided on reflection that the girl was well able to take care of herself, and that without weapons he would be rather a hindrance than a help. Thanks to a loose brick the wall was easily surmounted, and hurrying down the narrow lane he soon found himself on the quay. The place was quite deserted. Far off he heard the shouts and the firing of the belligerents, but here all was as quiet and undisturbed as the flow of the Maine. Presently the silence was suddenly broken by the sound of approaching horsemen, and he had barely time to draw back into a recess, when a troop of cavalry came round the corner of one of the neighbouring streets, at a trot. To his joy and relief he saw his friend Major Auerswald riding at their head, and hurrying forward, made himself known to him.

'How in the name of goodness came you here?' asked

the Major in great surprise. When Chessington had explained the matter as shortly as he could, he made one of the troopers dismount and surrender his horse to him, and after bidding him conduct him safely to his hotel, rode hurriedly on with his men.

As they slowly followed, 'Chessington's guide told him that some of the Radical members having petitioned the Archduke to withdraw the military from the town, he had answered their modest request by at once proclaiming martial law, but that Prince Lichnowski, one of the most eloquent and distinguished members of the Assembly, together with a few other lovers of peace, had determined to try and reason with the insurgents. Major Auerswald, bearing a flag of truce, was with his troop escorting these ambassadors on their kindly errand.

It would have been possible for the pair to have made their way through quiet streets to the Hotel Russie, but as both felt a strong desire to learn the result of the mission, Chessington easily persuaded the dragoon to lead him in the direction of the Constabler Wache, to which it had gone, as being the stronghold of the rebels. Their pace was, however, necessarily slow, and by the time they reached the Guard House, they found that the armistice of an hour which had just been proclaimed, had only been arranged by the sacrifice of two valuable lives.

Major Auerswald and the Prince, who had just ridden forward with a white flag in order to open negotiations with the insurgents, had been received with a volley, which caused the former to fall from his horse mortally wounded, and completely disabled Prince Lichnowski, who was then pulled from his saddle by a party of

ruffians who sallied from the Guard House, and inflicted terrible injuries on him with their hatchets.

'We were about to charge,' said the soldier who narrated the event, 'when we saw a huge red-headed man dash from the Guard House, strike down with his own hand one of the Prince's assassins, and, spite of wounds which the brutes gave him, drive off the rest with imprecations. We gave him a cheer, for the poor fellow fell down fainting from loss of blood on the steps of the Constabler Wache. Then another of the rebels came forward, and the armistice was arranged. Hoffbauer, or some such name, they called him, this big Republican. 'Tis a pity he's so wrong-headed, he would have made a fine soldier.'

'And where have Major Auerswald and the Prince been placed?' asked Chessington, deeply shocked by this news.

The trooper told him the name of the hospital to which they had been carried, and he at once proceeded there. He found, however, that his poor friend was quite unconscious, and he expired very soon after his arrival, though Prince Lichnowski, in spite of the terrible mutilation he had suffered, lingered on till the following day. Chessington made his way sadly back to his hotel, and hardly had he reached it when the deep booming of cannon rang through the air. Artillery had been brought into the city, the barricades were everywhere destroyed, and before midnight complete tranquillity had been restored. His thoughts, however, were entirely diverted from all other matters by the contents of a letter which he found awaiting him.

CHAPTER II.

Gives some account of the Chessington family.

Will Fortune never come with both hands full,
But write her fair words still in foulest letters ?
She either gives a stomach, and no food,—
Such are the poor in health ; or else a feast,
And takes away the stomach,—such the rich
That have abundance, and enjoy it not.—SHAKESPEARE.

IT is not easy to describe the painful shock, and the tumult of feelings which the perusal of the letter mentioned in the last chapter produced in Chessington. It informed him of the sudden and unexpected death of his father, to whom he was passionately attached, and whom he had looked up to and trusted as only a rather weak and self-distrustful son can rely on a parent whom he loves and reveres. Without the slightest premonitory warning he had been seized with a sudden spasm of pain while transacting business in his study, and almost immediately expired, and the writer, Chessington's sister, implored her brother to return home immediately. He sat down half stunned by the rush of conflicting emotions, and tried to realize all the consequences of this terrible loss. He had not only been deprived of his best and dearest friend, but the same event which had caused him this great sorrow had also invested him with the care of a large estate, and left him as the chief protector and adviser of his mother and only sister, As an only son he had been indulged in every wish

from his cradle. He hated trouble of any sort, and had an absolute dread of responsibility, and now he was suddenly called upon to take a high position in the society in which he lived, and one which, owing to certain facts to be now explained to the reader, was peculiarly trying to a sensitive and generous nature. His father, Captain Chessington, was a natural son, and had moreover acquired his property under conditions which caused his ownership to be regarded with disfavour by some of his neighbours, though he could not himself be considered in any way responsible for them.

The estate of Otterstone Hall, which had originally been held by an ancient Roman Catholic family of the name of Oakburne, had passed from their hands on account of the prominent part taken by Sir Francis Oakburne, representative of the house in Elizabeth's reign, in Babbington's conspiracy of 1587. Death on the scaffold and attainder were the results of his devotion to the cause of the ill-fated Mary Queen of Scots, and the Otterstone property, after changing hands more than once, was eventually bought in 1605 by Sir Thomas Chessington, Knight, and Alderman of London.

The majority of his descendants found themselves, as a rule, on the winning side, throughout the various troubles which disturbed the peace of the kingdom in subsequent reigns, and managed not only to retain, but to add to their ancestral estates. These passed soon after the accession of George III. into the possession of Sir Pelham Chessington, whose father, General William Chessington, had been created a baronet in the previous reign in reward for his gallant conduct in the field both in India and America..

Sir Pelham was well known as a man of fashion and

taste, but he was a great disciplinarian in his own house, and had very strict notions with regard to religious observances, and it was on account of the restraints he was under at home, that George, the elder of his two sons quarrelled with his father and absented himself as much as possible from Otterstone. He was, however, his father's favourite, and his death in 1791, at the Assault of Fort Kistnagerry, in the Madras Presidency, where he was serving as a Lieutenant in the ——th regiment, was a blow which Sir Pelham never recovered, though he survived it some years. He cherished the memory of his son with peculiar tenderness, and became softened to the two children who still remained to him. Of these, James, the younger, who had served in the navy, inherited the property on the death of his father, who died intestate. His sister, Isabella, had married a gentleman of the name of Beechcroft, who owned an estate in the neighbourhood, and as her brother was a bachelor, it was generally supposed, and he himself gave her to understand, that her son would be his heir. Such seems to have been his original intention, and it was only after he had been in possession of his estate many years that he formally acknowledged his natural son, Horace, and at the solicitations of Horace's mother, the sister of a brother officer, made a will, leaving all his property to him, to the total exclusion of his nephew.

Horace Chessington, through his father's interest, obtained an ensigncy in the army, and being handsome and clever, blessed with an agreeable manner, and furnished with ample means, he soon became popular in his regiment and in society. Among others, he formed a close friendship with Giles Rowancourt, only

son of the Earl of Asheleigh. The two made the grand tour together, and took the pleasures of the town in company; and on one occasion Captain Chessington, went out with a certain French Count whom he overheard aspersing his friend's reputation, and succeeded in wounding his adversary. They were in short inseparable, and it was to this intimacy that Chessington owed another of the gifts which Fortune so lavishly bestowed on him to recompense him for the flaw in his birth. It was when he and Giles were at Brighton together that the Captain was introduced to the Lady Adela Rowancourt, who with her mother and five elder sisters was staying at that fashionable place of resort. She was young, pretty, and impressionable, and the attentions of her brother's good-looking friend led to a close intimacy, which ended in an engagement. When Lady Adela, against her lover's wishes, informed her mother, the Countess of Asheleigh, of what had occurred, her ladyship was furious, forbade Chessington the house, and shortly afterwards took her family to Cheltenham, where the Earl was taking the waters as a specific for the gout, to which he was a martyr. The Captain, however, was a resolute wooer, and followed them thither, and the result was a runaway match, which for a time cut Lady Adela off from her family, with the exception of her brother Giles, who made no difference in his intimacy with his brother-in-law. It was said by his friends that he gave the couple the money they required for the elopement; by others that he was so deeply in Chessington's debt that his consent to the marriage was taken by the latter as a wiping off of old scores. Be this as it may, the friendship remained unimpaired, and when Horace Chessington

found himself suddenly in possession of Otterstone Hall by his father's will, the rest of his distinguished relatives by marriage so far forgave him as to receive their sister back, to a certain limited extent, to the bosom of the family. Though of ancient lineage and connected with some of the noblest houses in Scotland, the family of Asheleigh was at this time somewhat impoverished, and Lady Adela's husband now found himself possessed of a greater property than those of her two married sisters. Her 'wicked folly in eloping with a penniless nobody,' as her mother had been wont to term it, was therefore condoned, and Horace Chessington set himself to work with his usual vigour and address to try and gain the goodwill of his neighbours. In this, however, he only half succeeded. The County of Clayshire was a very Conservative one, and it happened that the family of Mr. Beechcroft, which had been established there for many generations, was held in as high an estimation as that of Chessington. James Chessington was considered by all the numerous friends of the Chessington and Beechcroft connections to have put an insult on them by leaving his large property to an illegitimate son, and thus injuring the prospects of his sister's child. All these, therefore, the more Tory portion of the county, kept resolutely aloof from the new owner, and expressed the deepest sympathy with Mrs. Beechcroft's son, General Beechcroft, and his wife ; a feeling that was still more strongly increased when the latter soon after lost, by a sudden illness, both their elder children, and were left with only one little girl. Sybil Beechcroft, as the child was named, was spoken of by the Beechcroft faction as 'the heiress of Otterstone,' and the General was repeatedly urged to go to law and

upset the will, until, wearied by this impracticable advice, he pointed out as forcibly as he could, and, once and for all, that the law was powerless to aid him. Such a determined opposition might have daunted a less resolute man than Horace Chessington, and was a great trial to his amiable and sensitive wife. He was, however, not easily turned aside from his purposes, and resolved to live it down and succeed in spite of it, and as the Tories set their faces against him he became an ardent Whig. A man who could command so many votes, was so hospitable and such an excellent sportsman and man of business, was not long in making himself popular, and in this, his wife, Lady Adela, against whom personally, not even her husband's enemies could say anything, ably seconded him. The Beechcroft faction as years went on allowed its animosity to slumber, save at election time, and when Walter Chessington received the news of his father's death, the position of the family in the county had for many years been fully assured.

Had he therefore inherited more of Captain Chessington's disposition, Walter would not have felt so depressed by the thought of becoming master of Otterstone. The idea, however, that his father was a bastard, and that those who ought to have possessed Otterstone were deprived of it by an injustice done in behalf of his family, was deeply painful to him, and the feeling was made more bitter when he by chance met Miss Beechcroft and became for a time much enamoured of her. For some months he fell into such a depressed state that his parents grew anxious and after some difficulty persuaded him to go abroad with some college friends, and when the party dispersed, Walter for a time wandered over Europe by himself. The cheerful tone of

his letters soon made it evident to those at home that the change had done its work, and his father having summoned him back with a view to get him to enter public life, he was, as the reader has already been informed, now travelling leisurely towards England. Hence the sudden news of Captain Chessington's death fell with such crushing weight on him, that it was some little time before he could come to any decision, even as to his journey. He felt, however, that he must return at once, and at last roused himself to make the necessary arrangements for starting next day as soon as the disturbed state of affairs made it possible. Then after a few hurried lines to his sister he went to bed. The events of the day, however, haunted his slumbers and after passing a weary night he rose early.

As he sat dejectedly at breakfast, the waiter, who had taken a liking to the good-humoured young Englishman, tried to cheer his evident dejection by chattering about the doings in the town.

'Had the Herr heard of the Regent's proclamation? No? Ah it was a grand one! He had said that it was his duty to protect the country against domestic crime as well as against foreigners. He had said, "I know my duty, and I mean to fulfil it, and you German men, lovers of your country and of liberty, from you I expect that you will stand by me." Was that not fine?'

Poor Chessington wearily assented.

'Would the Herr have some cold meat?' 'No?' 'Another egg, then?' 'Yes!' 'Ah, that was right! The Herr must prepare himself for his journey. Did he know that there had been a vote of confidence in the ministry passed, and also a vote of thanks to the Federal troops? Yes it was so. All was right now; quiet was

restored: But those ruffians had behaved terribly, abominably.'

Chessington agreed that they had and enquired whether the troops had succeeded in capturing many of the rebels.

'A good many, Mein Herr,' answered the waiter; 'yes, a good many, but some important ones have effected their escape. There was one Hoffbauer, a noted rascal, brave, and not so bad as some, perhaps, but a turbulent villain, who has given them the slip. A very powerful man, big, courageous as the lion, but still pestilent, you understand. It is possible he is killed, so many were slain, as they deserved. Ah! when they break all laws they must expect to suffer without mercy! Is it not so?'

Chessington admitted that, perhaps, he was right, and then put an end to the good-natured fellow's gossip by calling for and paying his bill.

Though his sorrow had deadened nearly all his interest in affairs at Frankfort, he felt glad to think that his deliverer, Hoffbauer, had probably escaped, and during the long journey homewards, after he had left the city, he found himself frequently recalling his strange adventure, and wondering how poor Theodore and Frederica were faring. He resolved that, come what might, he certainly would never forget the debt of gratitude which he owed them.

CHAPTER III.

A Walking Excursion ; and what came of it.

I was a sketcher then ;
 See here, my doing ; curves of mountain, bridge,
 Boat, island, ruins of a castle, built
 When men knew how to build, upon a rock
 When turrets lichen-gilded like a rock :
 a Tudor-chimnied bulk
 Of mellow brickwork on an isle of bowers.—TENNYSON.



HERE is a saying among the inhabitants of Clayshire that the county is famous for its 'spires, squares, and spins.' It has been declared by some disappointed lover or bitter misogynist that by 'spins' are meant the unmarried ladies of the district, and the saying is often quoted in this sense by gentlemen when they want to be jocular or sarcastic. The ladies, on the other hand, assert with far more apparent reason that 'spins' stands for spinnies, the Clayshire term for a copse, and it is certain that, setting aside the unjust aspersion on their sex, they are right in their contention. The country, for the most part, presents an alternating series of sharp ridges and deep hollows. Every hollow is watered by a stream, and at intervals along the course of each stream, will be found a 'spinny' or copse of willows and birches, perhaps garnished with a few Scotch firs. These spinnies form good covers, and make a picturesque feature in the scenery which, though pleasant, can boast of no pretensions to grandeur or striking beauty.

The county is almost entirely agricultural, and to those who do not appreciate an ordinary English landscape, Clayshire, with its expanses of undulating pasture and arable land, its well-timbered parks, substantial country houses and homesteads, and its abundance of spires, is apt to appear a trifle monotonous.

Anyone, therefore, who, like the Rev. Owen Bowersby, vicar of Otterstone, considers that the grander features of nature are alone worthy of contemplation would have looked with something of surprise on two young men whom he had been watching from his window for the last ten minutes gazing down on the village, and more particularly on the hall, from the eminence above it.

‘What can they possibly be at!’ he said at last, putting off his spectacles, for he was short-sighted; and as his curiosity was rather excited, and as he had nothing particular to do, he determined to walk up across the fields and reconnoitre them. It was a beautiful morning in the beginning of March, the heavy rains which had fallen continuously for the previous fortnight had ceased, and everything bore the impress of the coming spring. So he yielded to the impulse, got his hat and stick, and set out from the vicarage.

Meanwhile, the two objects of his attention, unconscious of the scrutiny of the portly figure that leisurely approached them, continued to occupy their position on a high bank upon one side of the steep road that here descends into Otterstone. The younger of the two strangers, a tall youth of about twenty, was sketching Otterstone Hall, while his companion, a well built, athletic looking young man, some three or four years older, was standing by him, occasionally making suggestions in a decided tone, at other times studying the scene

before him as if he would fain impress it on his memory. It was easy to see that the pair were brothers, though rather from an indescribable general likeness than from any particular points of resemblance. The elder had the firm carriage of the military profession to which he belonged, decided aquiline features, dark brown curly hair, and a pair of resolute blue eyes. Those of the younger were of a lighter hue, and had a dreamy expression that spoke of a temperament fonder of contemplation than of action; his hair was fair, and his features irregular.

‘That tower is rather crooked, old fellow,’ said the elder authoritatively, ‘and those trees down in the hollow are too washy.’

‘I want to give the effect of the haze, you see, Rex,’ replied the other. ‘A little haze improves a landscape wonderfully to an artist; at least, I always think so. Besides, our associations with the place are rather hazy,’ he added slyly, ‘so it is not altogether inappropriate.’

His brother looked rather annoyed. ‘I see you can’t appreciate my feeling about the place, Wilfrid,’ said he. ‘I know it rather amuses you that a man of my temperament and tastes should care about such things. But I can never forget that I come of an old stock, and that Otterstone once belonged to my ancestors. It is a very strong feeling with me; and now that I am going abroad I wish to carry away some reminiscence of a house that is so connected with the history of our race. Do you understand? That is, of course, my reason for asking you to sketch it, as you like that sort of thing and chance has brought us into the neighbourhood. I must say, I wonder you of all others can’t understand me.’

‘I do understand you to a certain extent,’ answered Wilfrid, ‘of course one feels one’s connection with the place in a way. Still its all so vague. Two hundred years ago, wasn’t it that our people lost the place?’

‘Two hundred and sixty odd years ago Sir Frank Oakburne was attainted for his so-called treason,’ rejoined his brother, ‘and ever since then the Oakburnes have been going down in the world. But they have always been gentlemen and true to the old faith—at least you, as far as I know, are the first Protestant of our name, and that of course was in deference to our mother.’

‘Yes, fortune has been rather hard on the Oakburnes!’ said Wilfrid. ‘I wonder what we should all be doing now if our respected ancestor had never made Babington’s acquaintance. Was it not Babington’s conspiracy that cost him his head?’

‘Yes, if he had been a wiser man you and I might be sitting in that house now.’

‘Or might never have come into the world at all,’ said the other, and the two regarded in silence the scene before them.

The house, the greater part of which was built of the ironstone which is found plentifully in the county, stood on an eminence opposite to them, while the little river Otter, crossed in the hollow by a picturesque stone-bridge and bordered by the *spinny* on the park-side of the road, flowed in the valley between. A portion of the Hall, distinguishable by its turrets and a round grey tower, had been built in the troublous times of the Wars of the Roses, but the greater part of it was of the date of Henry VIII. The park around it was well-filled with elms, oaks, and⁷beeches, but immediately in front of the house was a level piece of lawn bordered by a broad

terrace, from the other side of which the grass sloped gradually down to the river, here widened into a small artificial lake, between which and the paling close to them was a dense copice of osiers. On their right lay the little village with its two farm houses, its rectory, and picturesque old church, which could be approached by a path over the fields, crossing the Otter by a foot bridge. The sky was bright and clear, the air fresh, and everywhere the trees and hedges were coming into bud, while over the river and amongst the osiers a faint blue haze was hovering. To Wilfrid and his brother, who had walked some miles to see it, the whole had made up a picture pleasant to contemplate in the sunlight.

‘A pleasant morning for sketching,’ said a voice close to them, and turning, they saw the inquisitive vicar, who, unperceived, had come into the road by a stile not far behind them.

‘Very much so,’ replied Wilfrid, picking up the brush he had dropped.

‘That is a fine old house, sir! a most picturesque object,’ continued the vicar, turning to Reginald. ‘That tower there is a good age; built in the reign of Henry VI., some four hundred years ago.’

‘So I understand,’ replied the latter. ‘Can you tell me, pray, who owns the place now?’

‘A Mr. Walter Chessington,’ replied the vicar. ‘His father, Captain Chessington, died some four years since. Quite a young man—unmarried—lives there with his mother, Lady Adela, and his sister.’

‘Indeed,’ said Reginald, amused at Mr. Bowersby’s loquacity. ‘Do you think we should be allowed to look at the park?’

‘Hum! let me see!’ said the clergyman, thoughtfully,

stroking his chin. 'I don't know—you see they are here just now—hum! well—' when as he was doubtfully considering the matter they saw a young gentleman and lady suddenly turn into the lane that ran parallel with the park and ride towards them.

'Ah! stay! here is Mr. Chessington and his sister. I will ask them,' and the vicar, going up to them, saluted the lady and made his request.

'We are on our way to Thornbury,' said Reginald, coming forward and taking off his hat. 'We shall be much obliged if we can be allowed to see the park.'

'Certainly,' answered Walter Chessington, whose acquaintance the reader has already made, perceiving that they were gentlemen. 'Wait though. If you are going to Thornbury you can take a short cut across the park. Perhaps Mr. Bowersby you would not mind showing these gentlemen the way. My sister and I must be moving on.'

Mr. Bowersby expressed himself very willing. The sketch was hurriedly finished, and the two Oakburnes entered the park in company with the good-natured clergyman, who commented on its various beauties in a way which showed he enjoyed his self-imposed task of cicerone.

'You don't belong to this county, I suppose, now!' said he, after dilating on the solidity which characterised the building.

'No,' answered Wilfrid, 'we do not. We are merely stopping at Thornbury; but we leave it to-morrow to return home. My brother leaves England next week to join his regiment in India.'

'Oh, indeed!' replied Mr. Bowersby. 'Ah, yes! I thought he looked like a soldier. What I was going to

say was that if you belonged to Clayshire you would know the merits of the ironstone as a building material. It is not only practically indestructible, but it has such a variety of beautiful tints. Look now at that part of the Hall—the east wing—with the sunlight on it. Isn't that the perfection of colour for a house, now ?'

'I'm not sure I don't admire that grey tower more,' said Reginald.

'Ah, yes ! the tower ! that, of course, is very old and picturesque. That little window, too, that faces us is associated with a tragedy, and with the only ghost story that Otterstone can boast of, which is strange in such an old house, eh ? Not that the ghost appears in that room, you understand. That was the room where Sir Walter Oakburne quarrelled with his bosom friend, Sir Walter Throckmorton.'

'And whose ghost is it ? Where does it appear ?' asked Wilfrid.

'I'm going to tell you,' replied the clergyman. 'We are just coming to the spot. You see that clump of beeches by the brook. They call it the glade. That is where the two men fought, and Oakburne killed Throckmorton. They were inseparable friends. Throckmorton had married Oakburne's sister, which united them still more closely. Throckmorton, who had property in another part of the county, was stopping here, and they were sitting in that room when during a discussion Oakburne hinted at something about his friend's wife which roused his anger, and the latter, who was very passionate and wholly to blame in the matter, forced on a quarrel by striking his brother-in-law. Oakburne did all he could to avoid bloodshed, but was so pressed that he considered himself bound in honour to accept the

challenge. They fought at daybreak next morning in the "glade" over there, with only one witness, a squire of Throckmorton's. Oakburne mortally wounded his opponent, who, as he was dying, implored his friend's forgiveness, calling his squire to witness that he met his death in honest fight caused solely by his own fault.

'When did this take place?' asked Wilfrid.

'In the reign of Richard III. Oakburne was deeply affected by the event, and ever afterwards when he went into battle he wore black, saying always that he longed for death to restore him to his friend. He was killed at Bosworth fighting on the side of Richard.'

'And is it his ghost?' asked Wilfrid. They had now reached the glade, an open space by the Otter surrounded on three sides by beech trees. The little river here formed an irregularly shaped pool thickly fringed with reeds, while at the far end of the level piece of green was a huge moss-covered block of grey granite.

'No; it is Walter Throckmorton's ghost,' answered the vicar. 'It is said that when any trouble is going to happen to an Oakburne who happens to be at Otterstone, the wounded figure of Throckmorton is seen just before dawn to drag himself to that boulder which commemorates the event, and to point, in a warning manner, to the window in the tower, which you will see just faces the spot.'

'So it does,' said Reginald going to the stone and looking back towards the hall. 'Has it often been seen?' added he, half incredulously, but interested in spite of himself.

'Well, as there have been no Oakburnes here since the beginning of the seventeenth century that is rather a

difficult question to answer,' said Mr. Bowersby with a laugh. 'That is the tradition at all events.'

'We are Oakburnes,' said Wilfrid. 'So perhaps we might see it.' His brother looked at him rather angrily.

'Oakburnes! are you, indeed! that is very singular.

'It is an odd coincidence,' said Reginald and his brother together, and then there was a silence of a minute, which was broken by the striking of a distant clock proclaiming that it was noon.

'Dear me! twelve o'clock!' cried the vicar. "I must be getting back. I had no idea it was so late. If you follow this path it will take you to a wicket gate close to where those deer are feeding, and that will let you into the road. There is a gate opposite which, if you like walking on grass better than the road, I advise you to go through.'

'I hate a high road,' said Reginald.

'Well, in that case, if you go through that gate, a field path will take you to Draxton, a village of some half-dozen cottages, with a queer little old church that's worth your looking at, and to which I ride over to do duty every Sunday afternoon. The village is quite in the fields. There is no highway to it, but if you follow the footway through it, it will take you straight into the Thornbury Road, and save you a mile and a half. And now I must be off.'

The young men thanked him for his courtesy, and Mr. Bowersby strode away towards the village.

'A good-natured sort of man,' said Wilfrid.

'Well—yes; but rather too talkative and inquisitive. There was no need, my dear boy, to tell him that I was going to my regiment in India, or that we were Oakburnes.'

‘ I can’t see any harm in it.’

‘ You must not be too “gushing” and communicative, Wilfrid. However, as you say, there’s no great harm done ; and I’m glad we’ve met him and seen the old place. What a grand old house. Ah ! if it were ours again ? ’ and Reginald fell into a reverie which kept the pair silent for some time.

The grass track which led to Draxton was for the first quarter of a-mile clearly enough defined, and soon they saw the church and the few cottages in the distance. After a certain point, however, the road split into a number of very faintly defined paths, the pedestrians chose a wrong one, and it was only after half-an-hour’s wandering, and after scrambling through two or three hedges, that they found themselves on the summit of a hill opposite to the little plateau on which the village stood. In the hollow between flowed a rapid stream, swollen by the recent heavy rains, to a breadth of some eight or ten feet. The hamlet itself was surrounded on three sides by deep hollows forming natural trenches. It consisted of a row of seven tumble-down cottages, two of which were in an utterly ruinous condition, and a tiny church without any pretensions to architectural beauty save in the tower, which was evidently of great age and well built.

‘ What a queer little settlement ! ’ said Reginald, and the pair were about to descend and cross the brook when Wilfrid, laying his hand on his brother’s shoulder, pointed to a sight which made them pause a moment in some amusement.

Below them, some ten paces higher up the stream, with looped-up skirts and bare feet, a young lady was standing in evident hesitation opposite to some stepping stones, the two centre of which were completely covered

by the unwonted amount of water brought down by the rains. In one hand she held a good-sized covered basket ; in the other the shoes and stockings which she had just taken off. Her exertions had loosened some locks of dark chestnut hair, and as she glanced around, before venturing to cross, she revealed a pair of blue eyes and a pretty flushed face that much enhanced the interest with which her two unseen observers were watching the movements of her lithe, graceful figure. Seeming reassured that she was quite alone she advanced slowly. The first two steps were accomplished in safety, but the third stone was more distant and necessitated a little jump. The water too was deeper and the landing place more slippery so that it was only with difficulty that she regained her footing, and in the effort to steady herself the boots and stockings slipped from her hand. Uttering a little cry of dismay she hurried over the two remaining stepping stones to the bank and, basket in hand, stood ruefully contemplating her lost apparel which, after being sportively whirled round for a moment in an eddy just out of her reach, was swept rapidly down the stream. It was with equal astonishment and confusion that she suddenly saw Reginald rush down the slope with a loud exclamation and dart in pursuit of it. Reckless of consequences he dashed into the water just in time to save a fast sinking boot, and, after a good of floundering and splashing, succeeded in recovering its fellow and the stockings which, hurrying across, he presented, dripping, and panting with his exertions, to their fair owner.

‘Thank you very much !’ said she, blushing crimson, ‘it was very awkward of me to drop them.’

‘Not at all !’ answered Reginald. ‘I am delighted

to have been able to recover them. The stream is rather rapid.

‘Yes! It is certainly, very!’ said the young lady, and then, becoming mutually conscious of the absurdity of the situation, they both burst out laughing simultaneously.

‘Can I take these—these things anywhere for you?’ asked he politely.

‘No! thank you! I think not,’ said she quickly. ‘That is—I—’

At this moment a tall thin middle-aged gentleman with a very upright figure, who was mounted on a powerful bay mare, suddenly appeared on the brow of the slope just under the church, and at once cantered towards them.

‘Sybil! Sybil!’ cried he.

‘Papa!’ answered the young lady.

‘What on earth are you doing here, Sybil?’ cried the horseman utterly astonished. ‘What is the meaning of this?’ looking at her bare feet. ‘And you sir, may I ask who you are, sir?’ he added fiercely, turning to Reginald, who stood, awkwardly enough, with the boots in one hand and the stockings in the other.

‘My name,’ replied Reginald equally fiercely, ‘is Oakburne—Reginald Oakburne of the —th Regt. What is yours may I ask?’

‘I am General Beechcroft, sir, the father of this young lady,’ said the other in a slightly milder tone. ‘Excuse me if I ask, sir, how it is we are indebted to you for your interference,—in short what you are doing with these—these, er, stockings of my daughter’s, sir?’

‘Sir!’ cried Reginald getting into a rage, and flourishing the dripping garments in his excitement. ‘I

tell you—' when Miss Beechcroft, who had gone off into another fit of laughter, interposed.

'Papa!' said she, 'Pray don't be so stupid. It is just this. I was coming down to take some things to old Nurse Bolton, who you know is very ill. The stream was over the stepping stones, and not knowing of course that anyone was near, I thought I would wade over. And as I was crossing I dropped my boots—' here she again burst out laughing.

'Very well, my dear! I don't see myself why on earth it should amuse you so much,' said her father.

'I dropped my boots and the other things, and this gentleman who happened to be on the other side of the stream, on the top of the hill there, very good naturedly ran down, and after a good deal of trouble, picked them up. That is all. I am sure I am very much obliged to him.'

'Oh! He happened to be on the other side!' said General Beechcroft, rather dubiously, looking from one to the other. 'Ah yes! I see.'

'Yes!' said Oakburne, still rather angry, 'that is what has happened, sir. If you will allow me,' he added, waving the unfortunate boots, 'I will make these over to you. I must rejoin my brother. I am glad to have been of use,' and he raised his hat to Miss Beechcroft and turned to go.

'Stay, sir!' cried the irascible General, now somewhat mollified, and beginning to feel the ludicrous nature of their position. 'Stay! I owe you an apology; but you must own that circumstances were—were peculiar. I am obliged to you, Mr. O—I did not quite catch your name.'

'Oakburne!' said Reginald stiffly.

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Oakburne. I repeat I am much obliged to you for the service you rendered my daughter. I wish you good day, sir. Come, Sybil! give me those things. We will go to Mrs. Bolton.’

‘Thank you so much for your trouble,’ said the young lady with a merry smile, and, with a bow from her, and a more haughty one from her father, the two went slowly up the hill and disappeared into one of the cottages.

‘Come along, Wilfrid! what a time you take!’ cried Reginald, as his brother, having seen the departure of the Beechcrofts, came down from his post of observation and leisurely made his way across the stream. ‘Do make haste man!’

‘Quite a pretty picture you made Regy, with the boots in one hand and the stockings in the other!’ said Wilfrid. ‘And the girl, too, with bare feet!’ And he burst into a laugh at the recollection.

‘All right my good fellow!’ responded the other angrily, ‘I daresay it looked very funny. But you need not have stood there grinning like an idiot.’

‘What could I do?’ asked Wilfrid much amused. ‘I held myself in reserve, as you would say in your profession.’

His brother made no reply, and they ascended the slope in silence.

‘I wonder who the girl was,’ said Reginald, as they gained the summit, ‘she was very pretty. I didn’t catch the old fellow’s name. I’ll just ask who they are. I say,’ addressing an elderly labourer who was standing by the church door, ‘Can you tell me who that lady was who went into the cottage there, and that gentleman on the bay mare?’

‘That gen’leman,’ answered the man with a grin, ‘why

General Beechcroft of Thornbury Grange to be sure, and Miss Beechcroft.

‘Beechcrome did you say?’

‘Beechcroft I said, of Thornbury. Most folk knows him about here.’

‘Is Thornbury Grange near here?’

‘Oh aye! A matter of two mile!’ replied the labourer, scanning him curiously.

‘And how far is it to Thornbury town.’

Mebbe five mile. ‘Tis a good four an’ a half. Straight down the lane,’ pointing to a gate leading into a grass road with thick hedges on either side, ‘turn to the left when you get into the turnpike.’


‘Then we’d better be getting on,’ said Wilfrid, and they walked on with but few attempts at conversation till they reached Thornbury.

CHAPTER IV.

In which Reginald Oakburne makes some new acquaintances.

Warm broke the breeze against the brow,
 Dry sang the tackle, sang the sail ;
 The lady's-head upon the prow
 Caught the shrill salt, and sheered the gale.
 The broad sea swell'd to meet the keel,
 And swept behind : so quick the run,
 We felt the good ship shake and reel,
 We seem'd to sail into the sun !

.
 By peaks that flamed, or, all in shade,
 Gloom'd the low coast and quivering brine
 With ashy rains, that spreading made
 Fantastic plume or sable pine ;
 By sands and steaming flats, and floods
 Of mighty mouth, we scudded fast,
 And hills and scarlet-mingled woods
 Glow'd for a moment as we past.—TENNYSON.

OME ten days subsequent to the events described in the preceding chapter, Reginald Oakburne found himself moving rapidly down Channel on board one of the P. and O. steamers bound for Madras. The great steamship company was in those days still, comparatively speaking, in its youth, but those who, like Reginald, found themselves pressed for time were glad to avail themselves of the facilities it offered in preference to the cheaper but more tedious voyage round the Cape.

To one blessed with good health and plenty of animal spirits, however, a voyage is usually very agreeable, and his pleasure was considerably increased by unexpectedly finding among his fellow passengers, the young lady and her father, whose acquaintance he had made as above narrated at Draxton.

General Beechcroft had been forced by the state of his affairs to leave his home in Clayshire. He had fallen a victim to the then prevailing mania for railway speculation, and found himself obliged to accept a command in India which would detain him there some years, and force him as he said to begin the world again in his old age, but which would enable him to avoid the painful necessity of parting with his patrimony, and give him the hope of eventually returning to enjoy it.

Long and anxious had been his meditations on this perplexing subject, and many the colloquies which he held thereon with the friend to whom he chiefly resorted for advice when in difficulties,—a certain Mr. Throckmorton, a barrister of Lincoln's Inn. His intimacy with the latter, who was some few years younger than himself, had begun at school and been continued through life, and his opinion was almost invariably accepted by General Beechcroft, when he found it hard to form one for himself. As therefore Mr. Throckmorton counselled it, his friend, who was still full of energy, accepted the Indian appointment which had been put in his way by some influential friends who sympathised with his misfortune. Still the wrench of leaving home had been very painful. He was no longer young, had been out of harness some time, and in addition to this, he was burdened with the care of his only daughter. It had been a great problem

with him whether he should leave Sybil at home with her aunt, Lady Felsparley, for whom neither of them had any very strong regard, or make her his companion. Sybil had, however, decided the matter for him by flatly declining to be left behind. Her father, she said, must have some one to keep house for him; the prospect of India would be delightful to her,—she quite longed to go there; and at all events she was quite sure that she could not bear to be separated from him. These arguments, supported by the more feminine ones of tears and caresses, easily defeated the poor general's scruples as to exposing his girl to the discomforts of travel and the injurious effects of an Indian climate. His daughter was to him the most precious thing in the world, and after all, anything would be better than to be separated from her. So the Grange was let, the horses were sold, and Sybil said good-bye to her pets and her garden. Mr. Throckmorton, who of course had known Miss Beechcroft since her childhood, accompanied the pair down to Southampton to see the last of them, and thus it came about that one bright windy April evening they stood watching with wistful eyes and sad hearts the fast fading coast of England.

The elements have, however,—and doubtless it is happy for us that it is so,—as little respect for human feelings as they have for the works of men's hands, or the barriers of nature. The gusty wind put a summary end to their melancholy reflections by catching the broad-brimmed hat which the General wore, and wafted it behind them. Sybil and her father turned hastily, and both gave vent to an exclamation of gratitude as a young man deftly arrested the progress of the flying hat and restored it to its owner.

‘Thank you so much, Captain Cope,’ said Sybil, turning towards the gentleman. Captain Cope was her father’s aide-de-camp, and had only left them a few moments in order to arrange something in his berth. He had been making himself very pleasant, and, as she was wishing at the moment that he would return and talk to her father, she, at the first glance, mistook the rescuer of the hat, who was much, the same height, for their friend.

‘My name is not Cope,’ replied the young fellow, bowing as he recognised the speaker; ‘It is Oakburne. But I think I have had the pleasure of meeting you in Clayshire.’

The voice recalled the occasion of their meeting to Sybil’s memory, and, as she reminded her father with a laugh of the circumstances, the latter also remembered it with some amusement.

‘Oh yes! I recollect you sir!’ said he, ‘You did my daughter a service. I think.’

‘Much of the same kind as that which I have just had the pleasure of rendering you,’ said Reginald, smiling, and then they all laughed in company, and fell to talking of the oddness of the rencontre.

Sociability on board ship becomes almost a necessity to even the sternest misanthrope, and many a pleasant intimacy dates from a voyage to India by the P. & O. The idle life, the monotony and confinement, draw out whatever good temper and cheerfulness the passengers possess; and many who meet each other as total strangers part as if they had been friends all their lives, and carrying away with them a full knowledge of many of the most confidential details of each other’s history. Desperate flirtations are matters

of course, and as often as not crowned by engagements ; while, on the other hand, alas ! quarrels, jealousies, and life long dislikes are equally the consequences of the enforced intercourse.

Reginald soon found himself on the best of terms with the Beechcrofts. He sat near Sybil at meals, was often her partner in the pleasant, merry, but somewhat rough dances they had in the evenings. He joined the General in his walks up and down the deck, and played at chess with him when he was so inclined. Both he and Cope were in a friendly way rivals for the favour of Miss Beechcroft. That Reginald was head over ears in love was patent, Cope would say in confidence to other men,—to the whole ship ;—but while his auditors owned that he spoke the truth, they had also to agree with Oakburne when he told them that it was clear that ‘Cope, poor beggar, was utterly gone about Miss Beechcroft.’ Their affections, however, did not, strange to say, interfere with their liking and friendship for each other, perhaps on account of their dissimilar temperaments. Cope, who was some four years the elder, was of a practical and somewhat phlegmatic disposition, and deliberate in his speech, with a slight lisp. Reginald had a strong spice of romance in his character, and was impetuous, and an animated voluble talker. He was fond of reading, and well informed on most subjects ; while Cope who was rather the reverse, and hardly ever seemed to open a book, having plenty of humour, had somehow picked up a mass of droll stories, riddles, and the like, which, told in his slow way, kept people in roars of laughter. Their very appearances were in contrast. Cope being fair haired, and rather stout and florid, while

Reginald, as has been said, was lithe and dark haired, and their respective accomplishments were the complement of each other. Cope sung and played admirably. Oakburne could do neither, but he was a capital draughtsman, and had a taste for caricature. It was Cope who organised the private theatricals that so amused every one on board, and in which he acted so well ; but it was Reginald who constructed the stage and scenery, and gave effect to the performance by his excellent stage management.

As for Miss Beechcroft, it would have been very hard to say which of these two admirers she preferred. She liked them both very well, no doubt, but they were not by any means the only men on board ; and, to tell the truth, she much enjoyed and made the most of the homage which she received from everyone as the belle of the ship. Perhaps she never passed a happier period in her life than during this voyage, which complete change of scene and the absence of worry, as well as the constant gaiety combined to make so pleasant. All the men vied in trying to make themselves agreeable to her, and she made friends with most of the ladies on board. The poor General, indeed, was rather bothered by the amount of attention his daughter received, and confided his troubles both to Cope and Oakburne.

‘You see, sir,’ he would say in his abrupt manner, ‘You see I feel she wants a mother to look after her. A man can’t be father and mother in one—confound it ! And that’s what my girl wants. What all girls want—some one of their own sex to advise ’em—to confide in.’

Of course both his young friends agreed with him. Perhaps they felt inclined to suggest that a male confi-

dent and adviser would be more desirable than a female one. So too did Mrs. M'Cormont, a lady with two marriageable daughters, who had made friends with Sybil, and whom the General took rather a fancy to. Perhaps she thought 'her Dora' or 'her dear 'Cora' had qualifications for the post. Indeed, the worthy woman would hardly have been human if some such idea had not crossed her mind when the General so frequently complained to her during the passage from Aden to Galle of the misfortune it had been to Sybil to lose her mother so early, and of the 'confounded nuisance,' as he called it, of the doctor's attentions to her.

The doctor's attentions were certainly very marked, and were made the more disagreeable by the peculiar disposition and views of that gentleman, whose name of Rovelli, as well as his dark eyes and crisp curly black hair, bore witness to the Italian blood in his veins. He was a fine looking man of about thirty, but his prepossessing appearance was neutralised by the familiar assumption of his manners, and his opinions, both on politics and morality. He disgusted the better class of men, by his frequent boasting of his successes with the *fair sex*, and his offensive parade of his disbelief in either female virtue or revealed religion, while his easy abandon of manner made the ladies for the most part rather shy of him. These, however, only saw the best side of his character, and as Rovelli had a magnificent voice, and considerable conversational powers, they found him an agreeable companion, and did not endorse the severe judgment of the other sex.

He early annoyed the General and the few military men on board by denouncing war as a remnant of barbarism, and declaring that he had no more respect for

the Duke of Wellington or any other great general than he had for the chief of a tribe of Red Indians or Italian banditti. The great exhibition of the previous year was, he said, 'the inauguration of a great cycle of universal peace, during which the barriers of tyranny and rank would be swept away by the steadily advancing and beneficent might of the sovereign people, who would thus establish the universal brotherhood of the whole human race.' This magniloquent nonsense was of course laughed at by the more sensible among the passengers, though the fire and grace of manner with which Rovelli delivered it made a strong impression on some of the ladies. General Beechcroft, however, heard it with intense disgust and anger. To begin with, he was an ardent Tory, and the mere mention of the progress of the 'sovereign people' raised his animus as being suggestive of rebellion and brutality. But his wrath was far more excited by the comparison of the Duke of Wellington to an Indian chief and Italian robber. His admiration for that great soldier, under whom he had served, and with whom he had had a slight acquaintance, amounted almost to worship, and such a speech regarding him was, in his eyes, flat blasphemy. He could not contain himself, but, in the silence which followed the doctor's eloquent outburst, he declared to Captain Cope in a loud voice, husky with passion, that 'By heaven, sir! if any man had dared to make such a remark at the mess table of the regiment I had the honour to command, I would have ordered him under arrest, sir—expelled him from the mess—and he would have been most certainly chastised by one of us—by all of us, sir!'

Captain Cope replied, with a laugh, in his slow way, 'that it would serve him doosid right well, too, by Jove!'

But the General left his half-finished lunch, and stalked solemnly out of the room; while his daughter got first very red and then very white. The doctor also grew a shade paler, and an unpleasant expression came into his eyes, but, as he afterwards explained, he was a man of peace. He chose to affect to ignore this sally on General Beechcroft's part, and went on as unconcernedly as he could to show how the 'germs of progress' were sprouting already in Italy, France, and especially in Germany. He, however, took the earliest opportunity of apologising in very courteous terms to General Beechcroft, which he did so skilfully, that the latter not only felt bound to accept his excuses but also began to accuse himself of having been too hasty, and Dr. Rovelli made use of the advantage thus gained to pay those marked attentions to Miss Beechcroft, which, as has been said, so strongly roused her father's animosity against him.

It must be owned that these were not so displeasing to the young lady, who, to tell the truth, was a little too fond of admiration, as the General could have wished. A great moralist has recorded his opinion that 'if any woman were to hang a man for stealing her picture, although it were set in gold, it would be a new case in Law;' but that if he carried off the setting and left the picture, his safety could not be answered for. Like most of her sex, Miss Beechcroft, much to Messrs. Cope and Oakburne's disgust, could not find it in her heart to be very severe to such an ardent and handsome admirer, who sang too as only a native of Italy can sing, as if liquid rolling song were his natural mode of expression. So the doctor continued his attentions, the two young officers, his rivals, chafed,

and General Beechcroft grumbled to Mrs. M'Cormont, amid the daily routine of eating and drinking, dancing and singing, flirting and squabbling. The squabbling especially increased, as is usually the case, with the heat and discomfort of the Red Sea, and seemed to form the chief amusement of many of the passengers till those on board the 'Cathay' awoke one Saturday morning to find the steamer coasting along a rocky shore covered with woods of palm down to the water's edge, and the news spread rapidly among them that they were off Ceylon.

There are few objects more refreshing to the eye of the traveller from Europe than the first glimpse of that green island after the sandy deserts of Egypt, and the barren rock of Aden. 'Dondra Head,' the southernmost point of the island, first appears an undefined grey outline on the horizon. The steamer coasts along a shore covered with luxuriant vegetation to the water's edge, until at length Point de Galle is sighted with its coral rocks, crowned by the fort, and backed by dim mountain ranges clothed with jungle to the summit, and the town, with its spacious, though dangerous harbour is reached.

After much time had been wasted in haggling with the Cinghalese vendors of so-called precious stones, a large party from the 'Cathay' landed to see what was to be seen in the place. General Beechcroft and his daughter, and therefore of course Messrs. Cope and Oakburne, were of the number, and to the annoyance of three at least of them, so was Doctor Rovelli. The General, seated between Dora, and Cora M'Cormont, who were as usual accompanied by their mother, gave

vent to an audible expression of disgust as he saw that gentleman descend into the boat.

Two or three old stagers who knew Galle too well to take the trouble to land there, watched the departing boat with lazy indifference as they smoked their cigars on the deck, and made cynical comments on the pleasure seekers whom she carried.

‘Galle’s a fatal place, Chapman,’ said Mr. Norris, an elderly civilian, returning as he hoped for the last time to India. ‘I’ve known many a flirtation brought to a head there. I’ll give you two to one in sovereigns that Oakburne carries off Miss Beechcroft.’

‘Done with you,’ replied Major Chapman, lighting a fresh cigar. ‘I fancy myself that Cope is the real favourite. He’s a steady goer, and when that sort of man’s once hit its always a case of win or lose. As for Dora and Cora, they’re nowhere. The General’s too old a stager to yield to Dora’s charms, though I must say it won’t be her fault or her mother’s if he doesn’t.’

‘I think you are both wrong,’ said Pilkington, a Bombay merchant, ‘I’ll back the doctor against both Cope and Oakburne. I’ll trouble you for a light, Chapman. I remember when I came out by the Cape in 18—&c. &c. &c.,’ and he began a story which served to occupy the time of the three till tiffin.

The party in the boat—or at least all the younger portion of them,—were in high spirits, and though there is little or nothing to see in Galle, they managed to enjoy seeing it wonderfully. They inspected the reservoir and the building in the fort, wandered round the ramparts, drove out a mile or two into the country, and finally, after having dined, extemporised ‘a little dance’ in the spacious room of the hotel.

The idea of the 'little dance' exhausted General Beechcroft's patience. He naturally thought that the dancers had quite enough of their favourite amusement on board ship, and, as his daughter insisted on taking part in it, he made her over to the charge of Mrs. M'Cormont, and went back to the ship. He began to feel more than ever that she wanted a mother to look after her. 'Its natural in the young of course,' said he to himself. 'I suppose pleasure-hunting's a second nature to them, but it is rather hard on an old fellow like myself.' His life had had a good many ups and downs. As quite a youth he had had his first disappointment with regard to the Otterstone property, which he had been brought up to believe he should inherit. He had lost two of his children when they were quite young, he had survived a wife whom he had fondly loved, and now in his old age he had had to begin life again and act the part of both father and mother to a high-spirited young girl. Though he idolised her he could not but feel it was rather weary work sometimes this constant watching over her, and dim thoughts of the possibility of his being released from his care by her marriage to some young fellow whom he could gladly receive as a son-in-law, crossed his mind. 'Ah! but what should I do without her,' he thought, and he sought the society of Messrs. Norris and Chapman to try and banish the melancholy reflection. Could he have foreseen all the consequences of the 'little dance,' he would doubtless have insisted on enforcing his paternal authority and taken his daughter back to the ship with him.

Mrs. M'Cormont was a good-natured Scotch woman, whose principal conception of her duty towards her daughters was to marry them as well as possible. She

quite intended to try and bestow *Dora* on General *Beechcroft*, while she thought *Cora* might be very happy with Captain *Cope*, who would, she had somehow learnt, eventually inherit some considerable property, and in whom she fancied that she had detected signs of admiration for 'dearest *Cora*.' *Cora*, however, was refractory, and on her part felt that Dr. *Rovelli* would make a much more suitable husband, and she therefore felt rather angry with Sybil *Beechcroft* for, as she called it, monopolising him. Her mother, however, was determined to subdue this rebelliousness, and was therefore well pleased that Sybil should keep the doctor out of her daughter's way.

'The doctor's a man of no breeding or family, *Cora*, ye understand,' she would say. 'One can see that at a glance, dear; and your dear father, I'm well assured, wouldn't care for us to cultivate his acquaintance. Ye comprehend me, *Cora*?'

'Wasn't grandpapa, her mamma's father, in *Aberdeen*, a timber merchant? I'm sure a doctor's as good as a timber merchant!' says the fair rebel.

'Your dear father comes of some of the best bluid in Scotland, *Cora*,' replied her mother sternly, 'and ye mustn't forget it. When I was a girl, I shouldn't have dared to say such a thing to my mother.'

To tell the truth, the good lady took care to keep all her acquaintance in mind of the fact that Captain *M'Cormont* was a distant cousin on the mother's side of Lord *Glenshale*, and made good capital out of the fact in cultivating the acquaintance of General *Beechcroft*, who was also distantly connected with that distinguished nobleman, and in fact, owed his present appointment to his influence at the Horse Guards. 'The *M'Cormonts*,' she

was wont to say, 'built their nests on the rocks, and led their clans to battle and plunder long before the Glen-shales, puir bodies, had ever been heard of in Glasgow.' Of her own family, the Hardys, timber merchants and corn factors in Aberdeen, she naturally spoke less.

It therefore fell out that Miss Cora made one or two little speeches which had the effect of putting Sybil very much on her mettle, and determining her to exercise her powers of fascination as much as possible at the other's expense. She was by no means ill natured, but still it is pleasant sometimes to punish people who will be rude. Then, too, she was further urged to be gracious to the doctor, because Reginald Oakburne, who she could see was devoted to her, had taken into his head to be very sulky whenever she spoke of or to Rovelli, and she was determined to read him a lesson. Captain Cope was not so stupid as to be offended, and yet disliked Rovelli just as much! These motives led her to receive the doctor's homage with great favour, and to give him more dances than was perhaps wise. People began to talk, and even Mrs. M'Cormont began to think her young charge imprudent. Poor Oakburne, after a while, gave up dancing, and stood gloomily watching the pair in the doorway, indifferent to all Cope's good-natured chaff. After a while he could stand the spectacle no longer, and leaving the hotel he wandered down to the beach below, and watched the sea dashing in heavy waves on the rocks. He felt thoroughly disgusted with Sybil, and indeed with things in general. The voyage would soon come to an end, and then he would be separated from the object of his adoration, and yet here she was giving herself up to a brute like that! If it had been Cope he would have borne it. Cope was a

right good fellow ! But this Italian—a man she knew her own father hated—it was too bad—it was revolting !

Meanwhile the doctor had been enjoying his triumph. It was a real pleasure to him to show these insolent young military men that he was a far more attractive personage than they were—that Paul Rovelli was not a man to be despised. Then, too, he really admired Sybil in his passionate way, and love-making came naturally to him.

They had just finished a waltz, when he suggested to his partner that they too should go out into the cool moonlight. Sybil hesitated. She was getting a little tired of Dr. Rovelli, and was annoyed at being noticed. Besides, she had promised to dance the next set with Oakburne, and she expected to find him waiting eagerly to claim it. She looked round in vain for him, however. ‘I don’t see my partner,’ she said.

‘If it is Mr. Oakburne, he is gone, I think,’ replied the doctor. ‘He was standing in the doorway. I saw him take his hat and go.’

Sybil felt very mortified. Well, if he did not care to claim his dance, he should not have it ! She was just going to ask Dr. Rovelli to take her to Mrs. M’Cormont, when she caught sight of Cora sitting with Captain Cope, laughing very much, and evidently making some remark, as she thought, about her. She felt very angry. She would show Miss M’Cormont that she disregarded her jealousy. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘I think I will go out, as my partner has deserted me. The moonlight looks so beautiful.’

The doctor was delighted. He led his partner triumphantly out of the room, and they descended the few steps that led from the hotel verandah to the rocks

below. They had hardly quitted the house when Sybil began to realise that she was acting very foolishly in encouraging this man. Her discomfort increased when Rovelli, after they had walked a little distance, suggested that they should sit down. There was something in his tone and manner which filled her with dislike. 'I think we had better go back,' said she, looking round anxiously. They had turned a point round some low rocks and found themselves in a little cove with a beach composed of millions of shells.

'Go back! when we have only just seen this loveliness!' cried the doctor. 'Look at the glorious moon, at the silver lighted waves! Look at the blue above, dear Miss Sybil, turn not yet I pray you!'

'Take me back at once, please,' said Sybil sharply. She felt herself blush crimson in the darkness. '*Dear Miss Sybil!*' Her anger at the man's caressing tone, and a vague alarm as to what he would say next, made her begin to tremble.

The doctor, however, was elated with success, and had moreover been drinking freely at dinner. He mistook Miss Beechcroft's manner for coyness, and perhaps suppressed emotion, both of which he was accustomed to disregard in the *fair sex*.

'Dear Sybil!' said he, taking her hand. 'Hear me, I pray you! Hear one who worships you and regards the beauty of the moonlit heaven as nought, when compared with the radiance of your glance.'

'Let me go at once, sir! Take me back instantly!' cried Sybil. Under different circumstances she would have laughed at this high-flown language, but now she felt ready to cry with shame and fear. 'Let me go, or I call for assistance.'

‘Never!’ cried Rovelli. ‘I am your slave, Sybil! Paul Rovelli is your slave! Never will I let you go till I have won a kiss from those lovely lips!’ and he tried to put his arm round her waist.’

Sybil, springing from him, cried aloud for help, and burst into despairing tears. Help was nearer than she thought.

‘You scoundrel! How dare you touch her,’ cried Oakburne, rushing forward between them as the doctor again advanced towards Sybil.

‘Scoundrel!’ said the doctor, turning very pale. ‘Scoundrel, to me! Retract that word at once, sir!’

‘You are an impudent scoundrel!’ repeated Reginald very deliberately, and facing his antagonist with a look full of scorn and anger.

The doctor glared a moment at him, and then, livid with passion, struck straight at his face.

It must be owned that this was rather what Reginald wanted, though he had not expected it, as he had imagined Rovelli to be an arrant coward.

‘You will have it, will you?’ said he, as stopping the blow, he replied by a terrific left hander, which sent the doctor sprawling on the sand.

‘Come back with me, Miss Beechcroft,’ he said, giving Sybil his arm. ‘It is lucky I happened to be wandering on the rocks.’

‘Reginald! Mr. Oakburne! Do take me back!’ and poor Sybil, clinging to him and crying, ‘How wrong I have been! Oh, I hope he is not hurt! Take me back to the ship at once!’ She felt overwhelmed with terror and confusion.

‘I don’t think you need be anxious about him,’ said Reginald gravely. The doctor still lay prostrate on the

sand, but he thought he might safely be left to come to himself.

‘I will take you to the boat,’ continued he. ‘We must all be going soon, and I will tell Mrs. M‘Cormont you are waiting there. Though mollified by being called Reginald, he still felt a grave disapproval of Sybil, which he could not help showing. He felt her shrink towards him as they ascended the steps of the verandah. ‘I will wait here!’ cried she. ‘That will be best of all. Let me sit here; and tell Mrs. M‘Cormont I am not well.’

Reginald seeing this would be the wisest course, did as she asked him, and begged Mrs. M‘Cormont to try and get the party back to the ship as soon as possible. After he had done so, and while the ladies were getting ready to return, he took an opportunity of telling Cope what had happened.

‘Serves him doosid right,’ was that officer’s comment, as indeed it was on most occasions of a similar kind. ‘But perhaps its a pity you hit him, eh?’ ‘You’d have done the same, Cope,’ replied the other. ‘You know you would. The question is, what am I to do now?’

‘Wait and see what he does,’ said Cope, after a moment’s reflection.

At this moment the doctor appeared in the doorway. He had an ugly cut on his forehead, and was very pale but preserved his usual *sang froid* and insolent swagger.

‘You will have to account to me for this, sir,’ said he to Oakburne in a low tone.

‘I’m quite ready,’ replied the latter. Dr. Rovelli was about to say something more when the ladies entered the room, and the whole party made their way down to the boats, and returned to the ‘Cathay.’


There was a sort of suspicion among them that something unpleasant had occurred, but the four who knew what it was wisely kept their own counsel, and all retired early to rest.

CHAPTER V.

Doctor Rovelli.

Beyond the infinite and boundless reach
Of Mercy, if thou did'st this deed of Death,
Art thou damn'd.—SHAKESPEARE.

Farewell ! a word that must be and hath been—
A sound which makes us linger ;—yet—farewell !—BYRON.

HE Sunday which followed the unfortunate fracas between Dr. Rovelli and Reginald Oakburne was one of those beautiful days which, on those rare occasions on which they come to us, seem to shed an atmosphere of peace and happiness over all created things, and to make even the most sorrowful feel that existence alone is a blessing. The beautiful island which the 'Cathay' had left at daybreak seemed now but a faint speck on the horizon, and a light breeze was blowing which just sufficed to ruffle into tiny waves a sea as blue as the cloudless sky above it. Oakburne, like everyone else, was soothed by the sweet influences of the day, and the events of the previous evening seemed for a time like the recollections of some hideous nightmare. The doctor did not appear at breakfast, but his absence from that meal was, owing to his duties, not unusual, and therefore occasioned no comment. General Beechcroft seemed unusually cheerful, and, though his daughter was somewhat silent and depressed, it was plain that she had told her father nothing of what had

happened at Galle. Everyone seemed in high spirits on account of the delightful weather and the prospect of a speedy termination to their voyage, and those who assembled round the Captain for divine worship were, so far as perfect content constitutes a thankful heart, well attuned to take part in it.

Oakburne and Cope had taken their places near the Captain, and the latter had just begun to read the service when the noise of a violent scuffle on the companion ladder leading from the saloon made him pause, and his hearers enquire of each other with some consternation what could be the cause of the disturbance.

They were not long left in doubt. With a wild shout, a man, half dressed, and with a drawn sword in his hand, rushed up the ladder followed by a terror-stricken steward who cried 'For God's sake take care! He is mad.'

The man he was following was Dr. Rovelli. His thick curly hair was all in disorder, his eye gleamed wildly, and his feet were bare, as, brandishing a cutlass, he passed through the terrified passengers assembled on each side of the deck. Singling out Oakburne with a look of bitter hatred, and shouting in a terrible voice, 'Revenge! Revenge!' he rushed towards him. Oakburne's fate seemed certain, for he and all around him were for the minute quite paralysed by the suddenness of the maniac's attack, when, to the admiration of all, Captain Cope stepped quietly forward, and fixing his eye on Rovelli, said, in a loud, stern, but perfectly calm voice—

'Doctor, give me that sword instantly.'

It was a moment of terrible suspense to all, and a deathlike silence prevailed, as, to the astonishment of the

spectators, the madman suddenly halted with a bewildered look, and dropped his uplifted arm.

‘Give me that sword,’ repeated Cope, in the same authoritative tone, still keeping his gaze fixed on him, and laying his hand on the hilt of the weapon. Rovelli surrendered it like a child; his head fell on his breast; then with a wild cry he sank on his knees, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed piteously. Courage and presence of mind had triumphed, and the danger was averted. The strain on those who had watched the scene was suddenly removed, and simultaneously, almost, their pent-up feelings found vent in a burst of applause. The cry seemed to arouse the maniac, who sprang to his feet and glared around fiercely; but by this time one of the quartermasters and some of the sailors had come to the rescue. Rovelli was seized and pinioned, and led without resistance below, and then it was discovered for the first time that both Miss Beechcroft and Miss Cora M’Cormont had fainted.

‘Cope!’ said Reginald Oakburne, going up to him. ‘Cope! I owe you my life. I——.’ His voice failed him as he seized the other’s hand.

‘Not at all, my dear fellow. It’s nothing,’ replied he. ‘You’d have done the same for me, you know.’

‘I don’t know how to thank you, old fellow,’ said Reginald, ringing his hand; ‘I’ll never forget, never . . .’

Meanwhile everyone crowded round Cope, praising him and shaking him by the hand, and every one wondered at the quiet way in which he received the general applause. He was, as had been said, naturally phlegmatic, and, as in all such natures, his strong pulses beat but slowly, and his brain was but seldom over-excited. To his matter-of-fact mind all this fuss was

rather astonishing. 'It's a great mercy I stopped the poor beggar, but it's just what you'd have done yourself, you know,' was all he could think of saying by way of reply to the congratulations showered on him, and people began to think that perhaps it really was the case. When the matter was discussed again in the evening, it was quite surprising to find how many men had really been just prepared to do exactly what Cope had done when he had anticipated them.

Though the affair, by reminding Messrs. Pilkington and Chapman, and other old stagers, of various adventures which had befallen them earlier in the century in different parts of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, served for a time to furnish matter for interesting conversation, its effect on the whole was depressing to the passengers on the 'Cathay.' The ladies, it is true, all agreed in regarding Captain Cope as a hero, and Miss Cora M'Cormont underwent a violent revulsion of feeling which raised the Captain to as high a position in her esteem as her mother could desire ; but they were also much affected by the blow which had fallen on the poor being whose fury he had so suddenly tamed. No one on board could help feeling pity for the unfortunate Rovelli, and, it was felt that gaiety would hardly be in good taste after what had happened. The evening dances ceased and the piano was but rarely heard, for, ever and anon, terrible cries would come from the cabin where the poor doctor was confined. The voyage began to grow wearisome, and all on board welcomed the evening when the 'Cathay' cast anchor in the roadstead of Madras.

It had been ascertained that Dr. Rovelli had relatives in the town, and it was decided to consign him to their

care. On the evening of their arrival, therefore, he was conveyed ashore under the charge of the chief officer, the time chosen being the dinner hour, as well to save the passengers from the painful spectacle, as to secure as much quiet as possible for the unhappy sufferer.

Reginald Oakburne had come on deck to see the boat take its departure, and as alone he watched it moving shorewards through the heavy surf, he felt very sad. His heart was full of pity for the unhappy Rovelli, and of regret for his share in the fate which had befallen him, and he resolved that, as soon as he got an opportunity after landing, he would go and enquire as to his progress. The next morning he would have to make the same journey as the poor doctor, and to say farewell to his friends. Chapman, two others, and himself, were the only passengers for Madras. The Beechcrofts and Captain Cope were going on to Calcutta. When should he see them, should he ever see them again? and he fell to thinking of all the incidents of the voyage, and, of course, of Sybil. He felt, unreasonably enough, a good deal of bitterness towards her for having, as he chose to think, avoided him since they had left Galle, and that feeling was struggling for mastery in his heart with an affection for her which had been unconsciously growing in strength during the voyage.

‘So you leave us to-morrow, Mr. Oakburne,’ said a timid voice at his side.

He started at the well-known tones, and felt rather self-conscious.

‘Yes, Miss Beechcroft,’ he replied, ‘I must say good-bye to-morrow.’

He had, to tell the truth himself, avoided Sybil—though perhaps he was scarcely aware of it—more than

she had him. In the first place he had taken offence at her imaginary neglect, and in the next—though he hardly owned it to himself—he had felt a strange diffidence in speaking to her after what had happened. Now that the time of parting approached he was angry with himself for his conduct. Yes ! to-morrow he must say good-bye ! and he felt a fresh pang at the thought. Then with the unreasonableness of a lover, his bitterness and jealousy suddenly returned. After all, what did she care, and why should she ?

‘I wish,’ said Sybil, nervously, ‘that is, I have never had an opportunity of thanking you for the service you did me.’

‘What service do you allude to ?’ asked he ironically, as the incident at Draxton rose in his mind.

‘You were so kind—you interfered for me,’ she began. Reginald chose to misunderstand her.

‘Oh, you mean about the boots. . . . I’m sure I was very glad.’

‘You know perfectly well what I mean,’ said Sybil, angrily. ‘I merely wanted to thank Mr. Oakburne for condescending to come to my assistance at Galle. As we were about to part I wished to acknowledge his——’

Her anger made him penitent at once.

‘I beg your pardon—Sybil—Miss Beechcroft, I mean. Forgive my rudeness and silly temper. I beg your pardon.’

‘I can’t see why you should choose to misinterpret my words,’ says Sybil, indignantly.

He felt that he was both foolish and rude. Perhaps this was the last time he should ever see her alone again. How pretty she looked in her anger ! His penitential sorrow increased,

‘I had no right to do so. It was utterly boorish and stupid of me. I beg your pardon. Do forgive me! Say you forgive me, Sybil!’ cried he, incoherently.

‘I only wanted to thank you, Mr. Oakburne,’ said Sybil demurely, turning away.

‘Thank *me!* You thank *me!* And for that! Why! Good Heavens, Sybil! You know I would give my life for you!’

‘Would you?’ says the lady in a very low voice, as he took her unresisting hand in his.

He forgot the ship, the passengers, and all conditions of space and time, and was only conscious of Sybil’s presence.

‘Sybil, darling Sybil,’ whispered he, ‘if you would only—

A dry cough made the pair start guiltily, and a voice in slow drawling tones, and with a very pronounced lisp, said:—

‘What a nith sthills thmooth night it ith! you’ll find thith the best place Mrs. M’Cormont.’

Reginald gave vent to a wicked ejaculation under his breath, as he turned and recognised his friend Captain Cope placing a chair for the mother of ‘Dora’ and ‘Cora,’ on the other side of the deck. Happily for Sybil it was too dark to see her blushes, nor could Cope observe the malevolent look which Reginald cast at him. If people choose to make love on the deck of a steamer they must be prepared for such interruptions, and Miss Beechcroft and Oakburne had to cover their confusion as best they could. The lady suddenly remembered that her father wanted her to read to him, and the gentleman, after watching her retreating figure for a moment, lighted a cigar, and remained for some while engrossed in the con-

templation of the moon-lit sea and the distant lights of Madras.

When he thought the matter over next morning as he donned his uniform, preparatory to leaving the steamer, he felt inclined to be angry with his friend, fond as he had become of him. Cope had come between him and happiness! Confound him! Why need he have coughed in that infernal way! And now he would have Sybil all to himself for the rest of the voyage; and see her every day, of course, afterwards. Lucky beggar! And he knew, too, that Cope was very fond of Miss Beechcroft. What chance would he, the absent Oakburne, have against such a formidable rival with such advantages! He felt for a moment savagely jealous of the man. But then; what a good fellow he was! And did he not owe him his life? After all, it was better to be beaten by such a rival as that, than by an inferior one, and after all, there was just a chance that he might *not* be beaten. So he steeled himself to say good-bye gaily to all his friends, and called the steward to get his luggage on deck. As he entered the saloon he saw Sybil and her father seated at the far end, and went up and made his adieux.

‘So we’re going to lose you sir, eh?’ said the general. ‘Well, I’m very sorry; very sorry. But we must all say good-bye some time, eh?’ and he shook Oakburne cordially by the hand, and expressed a wish that they might soon meet again.

‘I hope so, I’m sure, General,’ said Reginald—and the wish was at all events sincere, which is more than such expressions usually are. ‘Good-bye! Good-bye, Miss Beechcroft! I don’t suppose there is very much

chance of our coming across one another again—but—but I hope so.'

'Good-bye, Mr. Oakburne,' said Sybil demurely.

'By the way, where will you be stationed, Oakburne?' asked the General.

'At Madras I fancy, sir,—at the fort for some time to come.

'Ah! I shall take care to remember! Good luck to you, my boy!'

Sybil had walked away, and, as Oakburne turned to go, a fallen glove caught his eye.

'You have dropped this, Miss Beechcroft,' said he, overtaking her.

Something in his look made her colour.

'May I keep it, Sybil?' whispered he. And with a murmured adieu and a pressure of the hand, he hurried on to the deck. He had been very popular with his fellow-passengers, and everyone pressed forward to bid him farewell.

'Good-bye, old fellow! I shall never forget what I owe you,' said he to Cope as they stood by the ship's side. 'It's hard to say all one feels—but you know that I can never forget. . . .'

'All right, my lad!' replied the other, cutting him short with a hearty slap on his shoulder; 'I understand.' And then amidst a chorus of farewells, Oakburne and three other passengers entered the large rocking coracle, called in Madras a Masoola boat, and after passing safely through the formidable surf of that port with the usual accompaniments of yelling and tossing, were finally seized and borne ashore by half-a-dozen dusky pairs of hands.

Notwithstanding the pleasant hospitalities which en-

gross a young officer fresh from home on his arrival in India, Oakburne lost no time in seeking out Dr. Rovelli, and he was not a little shocked to learn from the worthy Italian merchant—an uncle of the same name—with whom he was staying, that his unfortunate nephew had become steadily worse since his arrival. The fever which disordered his mind had completely destroyed his physical strength, especially since its abatement, and the partial recovery of his faculties seemed to entail increased exhaustion of body. He was still, Signor Rovelli said, under the delusion that he had stabbed Oakburne, and now and then would pray him to forgive him, while at other times he would burst into violent abuse of him. It would hardly be possible for Reginald to see him then, but later on he hoped he would repeat his visit.

The troubled heart of poor Paul Rovelli was, however, to be sooner at rest than his uncle supposed, and it was no later than the evening of the third day after his visit that Oakburne was summoned to his death bed.

Driving rapidly under an avenue of spreading banyans, along a road chequered with black shadows and brilliant moonlight, he reached the Italian's house in a state of highly wrought feeling that impressed the scene indelibly on his memory. After a few moments of anxious waiting alone in the verandah, during which the ceaseless murmur of insect life that filled the air seemed almost oppressive, Signor Rovelli entered and conducted him to the room of the dying man.

There lay the wreck of the strong frame of Paul Rovelli. Oakburne could scarcely identify the head shorn of its thick black curls, and the pale hollow face so lately glowing with life and beauty, with the man he had known. The dark eyes looked weary and wistful

with constant suffering, and seemed, as he caught his visitor's name, to disclose some new trouble. His look changed to a happier expression as Oakburne, with evident emotion, took his hand between his own, and showed both by his face and manner his deep sympathy for him.

'You have come to forgive me, dear Oakburne! You are well again! Thank God your blood is not on my head! Say that you forgive me, for I am dying!' he gasped.

'Forgive you! Of course I do, my poor fellow! But there is nothing to forgive, Rovelli! I blame myself as much as you for it all; indeed I do!'

Rovelli smiled and seemed greatly relieved. 'Say again, "Paul, I freely forgive you,"' said he.

Oakburne repeated the words, and then Rovelli, turning with a great effort, took a locket from under his pillow and placed it in his hands. 'Keep this,' he said, 'and remember me sometimes. It was my mother's. She, too, was an Englishwoman; some day you may see her, and tell her all. And, Oakburne, do not be angry. I know you love Sybil, and you know my folly. Pray her to forgive me. I, too, loved her.'

'My dear Rovelli, I know that Miss Beechcroft feels deeply for you, and that she has no angry recollection of that unhappy evening.'

The dying man smiled and pressed his hand. Then he sank back, exhausted with the interview, and Reginald quietly withdrew. At his request, the elder Rovelli gave him the address of his sister-in-law, and furnished him with some particulars of his family history, which will be imparted to the reader later on, and the two parted with mutual feelings of esteem.

Reginald's first care on reaching his quarters was to note down the address of Paul Rovelli's mother and to examine her locket. It was of curiously chased silver in a circlet of brilliants surrounding the initials 'G. P. C.' in monogram. Inside was a curl of fair hair, and the name 'Estelle Chessington,' with the date March 23rd, 1877, below it.

'Chessington ! Estelle Chessington !' repeated he to himself. 'Where can I have heard that name ! Chessington ? I know I have come across it somewhere !' But do what he would he could not recall when and where, and his efforts were suddenly interrupted by the entry of a brother officer with the news that the regiment was ordered to Kurryapore in the Bengal Presidency.

Oakburne started. Kurryapore was the station to which General Beechcroft had gone. He chose, however, to conceal his delight under an affected irritation. 'What on earth is that for, Danvers ?' said he. 'What an awful nuisance ? I thought we were to be a year longer at Madras.'

'How on earth should I know ?' answered Danvers. 'You ought to be able to tell me. You are last from home. The ——th are to embark at once for England and we are to replace them ; that's all I've heard.'

'What a bore ! I say Danvers, did you ever hear of the name of Chessington ?'

'Chessington ! Let's see. No, never. Chessington ! You're thinking of Blessington, Lady Blessington and Count D'Orsay you know. I say, come and have a game of billiards.'

But Oakburne excused himself on the plea of having to write a letter, and Danvers soon went off to find a

more congenial companion, leaving him to try and collect his thoughts, a task in which for a time he had no great success.

CHAPTER VI.

At Lidfield.

For what then was I born?—to fill the circling year
With daily toil for daily bread, with sordid pains and pleasures?—
To walk this chequered world, alternate light and darkness,
The day dreams of deep thought followed by the night dreams of
fancy?—

To be one in a full procession?—to dig my kindred clay?—
To decorate the gallery of art?—to clear a few acres of forest?—
For more than these, my soul, thy God hath lent thee life.

—MARTIN TUPPER.

IT is a favourite theory now-a-days that all things move in cycles. We hear of cycles of faith and cycles of scepticism; cycles of commercial prosperity and of commercial depression; cycles of plenty and cycles of famine. The rule might plausibly be extended to more particular cases, and it might be argued that, could the history of many families be traced, it would not improbably be found that each had experienced its cycles of riches and of poverty, now rising and now falling in social position during the revolving centuries. It has already been intimated that while the Chessington family had prospered in the world, that of the Oakburnes, the old possessors of Otterstone Hall, had experienced a long run of ill fortune. Since Sir Frank Oakburne had lost his estates through his too great zeal for the Church

of Rome and the unfortunate Queen of Scots, who represented it, the fortunes of the race had been passing through a cycle of depression. Always poor and struggling, still clinging to their native country, and always true to the Romanist faith, they had for the most part gained their livelihood by fighting their country's battles by land and sea, until Godfrey Oakburne, the grandfather of Reginald and Wilfrid, had varied the usual programme by marrying the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer, and taking a farm in a county on the borders of Wales, which we shall call Hillshire. Finding farming unremunerative, he entered into partnership with a wool manufacturer, who had long been settled at Lidfield, Godfrey Oakburne's nearest market town. The firm of Elkfield and Oakburne thrived beyond the best expectations of its founders, and though the children of the junior partner never inherited any share in the concern, the profits enabled their father to start them all in life with a good education and a small patrimony. At the time this story commences, all of these had died without leaving descendants to perpetuate their name, save Henry, the second son, who had secured a fair practice as a doctor in Lidfield, and had the satisfaction at his death of leaving his widow and three children—Reginald, Wilfrid, and Ethel—comfortably provided for.

Lidfield is described in an old county history as 'a fine well-built market town, situated in a rich clayey ground.' 'It is,' adds the chronicle, 'much inhabited by clothiers, and has a good market weekly on Tuesdays, and two fairs yearly on the 1st May and the 21st September.' It claims to have been a boro' since the reign of James I., when Dr. James Thornton, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, was master of its ancient hospital, 'well en-

dowed for the relief of the poor,' and when Sir Eustace Thornton, the doctor's brother, and ancestor of the present Marquis of Thistledale, received from the Solomon of the North the titles of Baron Briarsby and Earl of Lyddlenesse. The descendants of the latter—the marquisate dates from the reign of Charles II.—have, it is said, ever since exercised a considerable influence over the elections. The river Lydd, from which the town derives its name, passes to the north of it on its way to the Severn, and to the east of it lies a pleasant range of wooded hills, studded here and there with the remains of Roman and British encampments. On Tuesdays, when the farmers come into market, and the gentry of the neighbourhood drive in to patronise the local tradesmen and see and be seen by their acquaintances, the town presents an animated appearance, though a stranger visiting it on any other day of the week might incline to describe it as picturesque but sleepy. Lidfield, however, in spite of appearances to the contrary, is, or rather was thirty years ago, a thriving country town which, though it might seem rather old-world and stupid to one accustomed to live in London, was regarded with much pride and affection by those who, like Wilfrid Oakburne and his sister, had dwelt there all their lives.

The Oakburnes inhabited a long, rambling, two-storied house on the outskirts of the town, with a garden running down to the Lydd, and from the windows of the morning-room, which opened on to the lawn, Mrs. Oakburne and her son and daughter, as they sat there one fine spring morning in the year 1853, got a pretty glimpse of the hurrying river, now swollen by the winter's rains and snows.

‘I don’t think I ever knew a more unpractical person than you are Ethel, except perhaps myself,’ said Wilfrid Oakburne, stretched at ease in the most comfortable arm-chair in the room, and looking remarkably morose and melancholy.

‘Even if I was,’ answered the young lady, who was a pretty likeness of the speaker, ‘Even if I was as weak and unpractical as you are—which I don’t believe anyone else could be—its very boorish and rude of you to say so.’

‘I don’t think there is much to choose between you. Rex is the only practical member of the family. Poor fellow! It is a year now, more than a year since he left us! Poor dear Reginald!’—and Mrs. Oakburne sighed as she thought of her favourite son, whom the reader has just left in the best of spirits at Madras.

She was a lady whose handsome regular features, and somewhat hard expression, showed that she had full confidence in her own opinions, and being blest with a good share of common sense, and having but little imagination, she was apt to be impatient with those who were of a less practical turn of mind. Just now she felt the absence of her eldest son strongly. His return to England on a year’s sick leave, at the close of the Sikh war, in which he had served with distinction, had done much to cheer her from the depression into which she had fallen on the death of her husband some five years before. Like the majority of his countrymen and countrywomen, Dr. Oakburne had speculated in railway shares during the mania that prevailed for that investment in the year 1846-7, and his widow had suffered in consequence. In addition to this, she was beginning to feel very anxious as to her second boy’s future, and her anxieties made her long for

a man like Reginald to whom she might go for counsel and support.

‘Poor dear Reginald!’ she repeated.

‘Poor old fellow!’ echoed her daughter.

‘Poor fellow indeed!’ cried Wilfrid the gloomy with some warmth. ‘Poor! why is he so to be pitied. He’s been uncommonly lucky! You are *always* telling me I am not practical. Only give me a chance, and you’ll soon see that I am just as practical as Reginald or any one else! Ah! why did I not go into the army!’

‘And yesterday you thought you ought to have been a sailor,’ said Ethel, who rather enjoyed teasing her brother. ‘There seems scarcely any profession in which you do not think you ought to have been.’

‘Come, come, Ethel!’ said Mrs. Oakburne, ‘somebody else I know is not perfect. You and Wilfrid are much alike in many ways let me tell you dear. You have certainly neither of you inherited the Bolderwood characteristics. You are Oakburnes both of you.’

She had been a Miss Bolderwood, (the Bolderwoods are an old Hillshire stock) and her family had, in the worthy woman’s opinion, for ages transmitted to their descendants a large proportion of the cardinal virtues. She was therefore fond of reminding her children of the achievements of various distinguished ancestors, and especially of those of a certain Sir Rupert Bolderwood, who, together with the garrison, met his death in Rolhill fort, some seven miles from Lidfield, the last possession held by the King’s forces in that part of England, sooner than surrender it to the Parliamentary force under Ireton.

‘I know all that, mamma!’ cried Ethel, ‘but whenever you talk about a profession, Wilfrid always changes the subject; and now that things are getting serious, he

really ought to make up his mind. He knows I only tell him so because I am so fond of him. Don't you, old boy ?'

'It's true, Wilfrid, that you ought to decide on something dear,' said his mother gravely, as she had said it any time during the last eighteen months. 'Face the question as a man should—as Sir Rupert Bolderwood faced—'

'Confound Sir Rupert Bolderwood,' cried her son, getting into a rage.

'Why not go on with medicine now that you have got so far,' said his sister ; but an incoherent oburgation against medicine and things in general, was the only answer which Wilfrid vouchsafed to her suggestion.

'My income is so seriously diminished now,' began Mrs. Oakburne, assailing him from a new point, 'That I feel it will be a struggle to keep on the house, and I should be very sorry to leave it.'

'Leave the house !' cried Wilfrid, starting to his feet ; 'that you never shall ! I'd sooner enlist ! You are quite right, something must be done. Look here ! I'll just go for a walk and seriously think over everything,' and without waiting for an answer he left the room.

'Poor fellow,' said Ethel, 'He is always seriously thinking over things, and it always ends in nothing but a walk to try and meet Beatrice Elkfield.'

'We must have patience with him, dear,' said her mother, and they fell to discussing Wilfrid's chances of success as a doctor.

Meanwhile the subject of their conversation was walking rapidly along in a very unamiable and discontented frame of mind. After following for a little way a path that skirted the river, he climbed a hill over-

looking the town, and sitting down began for the hundredth time to consider his future.

Owing partly to circumstances and partly to his own indolence, Wilfrid Oakburne found himself at three-and-twenty still dependent on his widowed mother. When he was beginning to acquire a fair knowledge of medicine, an accident in the cricket-field, which laid him up for a year, compelled him to discontinue his studies at St. Christopher's Hospital in London. Then his father had died, his brother had returned from India, and from one cause or other he had failed to renew them, and never taken up any other profession. His abilities were decidedly above the average, and his mother and sister felt naturally aggrieved that they should be frittered away in an aimless course of desultory reading, varied by fits of devotion to the study of painting, of which Wilfrid was very fond. They saw with anxiety that continued idleness was making him daily more and more disinclined for an active career, and that his indolence and irresolution were being encouraged by the fact that he had been foolish enough to fall in love with Miss Elkfield, the daughter of the present representative of the firm of Elkfield and Oakburne. The two had played together as children and been intimate all their lives, and Wilfrid's love had, almost unknown to himself, grown and kept pace with his development from boyhood into manhood. To some temperaments such a passion might have proved an incentive to work, but with young Oakburne it expended itself in writing verses to, and drawing portraits of the object of his admiration, and losing much time in moony reveries on her attractions. It will be plain to the reader therefore that this young man was 'rather in a bad way,' and that his relatives

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had some cause for their endeavours to drive him into making a start in life. It was destined that these should now at last meet with success.

After a good deal of reasoning with himself, and a good deal of self-pity, and sentimental regret, Wilfrid Oakburne decided that it was not fair to his mother and sister to be idle any longer, and that he really would re-enter himself at St. Christopher's Hospital, and qualify himself to practice as a doctor, concluding with a mental picture of a home at Lidfield with Beatrice Elkfield as its mistress. After making these wise resolutions he leisurely descended the hill, commending himself not a little for the sacrifice he considered he was making, in voluntarily forsaking his pleasant life of idleness for what he chose to assume would be a course of tedious drudgery. Instead of taking the path he had come up by, he chose a more circuitous one which would lead him close to the Elkfield's house, and as he emerged from a wood of venerable ash trees, that clothed the base of the hill, he saw the young lady in whose favour he had been making the above mentioned flattering resolve coming up the road, accompanied by an ungainly, frolicsome Newfoundland puppy, which was dashing hither and thither in the utmost disregard of its mistress's commands. Just as Wilfrid was preparing to meet her the obstreperous dog dashed into a cottage garden, and the young lady had to enter in pursuit. He reached it just as she came out, followed by the smiling owner of the cottage, to whom she had been apologising.

'You should take him in a chain, Miss Elkfield,' said Oakburne, saluting her as he felt with a mixture of bashfulness and defiance, 'a dog like that wants training you know.'

‘Do you think so?’ answered the young lady, looking all the prettier from the colour that exercise had brought into her cheek. ‘Of course I’ll do so if *you* think it right,’ she added with a mischievous twinkle in her dark eyes.

‘It’s the best thing you know. He’s young and wants training.’

‘Really? I wish you’d come and train him! Why do you never come and see us now. ‘I suppose you are very busy! so many engagements of course!’

‘I shall be very glad to come over, but I think he ought to have a chain—’

‘A chain my good fellow! a puppy in a chain! Ha, ha! What are you thinking of, Oakburne,’ says a loud powerful voice close to him, and Wilfrid turning sees a tall, slight, young man, some three years older than himself, with thick black whiskers and moustache, who greets Miss Elkfield with jaunty ease.

‘Oh! Mr. Portal!’ said the latter with a little start, ‘How do you do? You should not take people by surprise in this way! So you don’t approve of the chain plan? Mr. Oakburne says it is so good!’

‘No! certainly not. I should say a whip,’ is the decided reply.

‘Well, I daresay you’re right,’ says Wilfrid, rather sulkily. He had never in truth interested himself much in such unpoetical matters as the training of dogs. ‘He seems to want control of some kind. I must be going. Good-bye Miss Elkfield,’ and he shook hands with the pair, feeling that whatever the dog might require, Portal certainly needed a whip, and that he should like to apply it.

‘All well at home! Good news from India,’ calls

Portal after him, who makes a point of being civil to everyone.

‘Yes,’ replied Wilfrid curtly, and he strode savagely down the hill.

Of course being jealous of him he did not like Portal. It was too evident, as he thought, that Miss Elkfield did. Portal seemed to be always at the house, and on the best of terms with the whole family. And who was the fellow? Merely a pushing young solicitor who had an insufferable amount of impudence and self-confidence. What a fool he, Wilfrid was, to care for such a little flirt! and he soon found himself again beside the river in an even more unpleasant mood than he had left it an hour before. He stood for a moment and listened moodily to the swirling water as it swept through the reeds, past rich broad meadows, the hedges in which were just beginning to bud.

‘What a fool I am to go on like this!’ he involuntarily exclaimed, and then he glanced down the bank wondering whether anyone had heard the uncomplimentary remark. He was startled to see some twenty paces ahead of him a young girl standing beside one of the pollards, a row of which skirted the bank. Surely he knew her! yes! It was Lois Simcox, the school mistress. He knew her as a quiet, nice, pretty girl, whom everyone spoke well of. What could she be doing here? She evidently did not see him. His curiosity was awakened, and he stood and watched her.

What was that? It sounded like a sob! She turned and looked anxiously round as if to see whether she was observed, and he could see that her eyes were red, and her face swollen with weeping. ‘Poor girl!’ thought

Oakburne. 'After all there are other unhappy people in the world besides me ! What a selfish brute I am.'

The girl took a step towards the water, and laid one hand on the gnarled trunk of the willow. Then she glanced once more furtively round with a look in her face that made Wilfrid feel uneasy. Was she thinking of suicide ? Good heavens she was ! On a sudden he saw her clasp her hands, cast an agonising look upwards, and then spring forward into the river. There was a splash, a shriek, and the next instant [she was being swept towards him.

Without hesitation Wilfrid threw off his coat and waistcoat, and, with a loud cry for help, jumped in to try and save her. He was a powerful swimmer, but the icy cold of the water numbed him, and his clothes hampered his efforts. The rapid stream bore her towards him and in another moment he had grasped her dress, when, with the desperation of a drowning person, she threw her arms round his neck and they sank together. It was a most perilous moment for both, but with a great effort Wilfrid somehow wrenched himself free, and rose gasping to the surface to find the girl had disappeared. He was preparing to dive when she rose some six or seven paces ahead of him, and, exerting all his strength, he managed to get up to her, and seizing her by the hair, struggle to the bank and grasp the reeds. He was too exhausted to raise the now senseless girl, and was obliged to content himself with clinging to the shore and shouting for help. Two men, who had fortunately been working in a field not far off, had heard his first cry, and now ascertaining his whereabouts, came hurrying up and helped the pair out.

‘Why, that’s Simcox’s girl,’ said one of the men, who recognised her.

Mr. Simcox was the schoolmaster appointed to carry out the terms of what was known in Lidfield as the Lightowler Charity, in accordance with which he occupied, rent free, a certain cottage and lands, and instructed without remuneration twelve poor boys of the town, while his daughter Lois, who received a small salary, taught the same number of girls.

‘However did she manage to get into the water, sir?’ he asked.

‘She fell in,’ said Wilfrid quickly, ‘and luckily I was walking behind her and jumped in after her. Make haste and help me to carry her home. It’s not far.’

‘Jumped in after her did you, sir? That’s well done, wasn’t it, Skibbers?’

‘That’s so! you’re right Bill,’ replied the other. ‘Master Oakburne, ain’t you, sir? the doctor’s son? I knowed him well! Brought my missus and babies through the scarlyt feeayver!’

Wilfrid replied in the affirmative, and the three, as tenderly and quickly as they could, carried the girl to the schoolmaster’s cottage which was at a corner of a street at the entrance of the town. The unwonted spectacle soon drew a number of loiterers round, and by the time they had arrived at the door of the house, they found themselves the centre of an eager, wondering crowd.

‘What’s this? what’s happened? Oakburne my good fellow what is the meaning of all this?’ asked a well-known voice as they halted and knocked for admittance. It was Portal, looking, as Wilfrid thought, strangely

white and excited, who had shouldered his way up to him through the press.

‘She fell into the river, sir, and this gentleman pulled her out,’ said one of the bystanders.

‘Well done, Oakburne! well done, sir! You’re a fine fellow!’ cried Portal, seizing his hand. ‘I say, she’s not dead! I hope she is not! is she? She’s only senseless don’t you think?’ He asked the question with an earnestness that made Wilfrid stare at him, and one of the crowd laughed. ‘The gentleman seems very anxious, don’t he,’ said the fellow, who was a wag, and his remark produced a general titter.

‘Death is a solemn thing, my friend!’ said Portal sternly in his deep bass voice. He could speak well in public, and was the chief pillar of the ‘Lidfield Debating and Mutual Improvement Society.’ ‘Death is an awful thing, and it behoves us to respect all its associations. You seem to forget that this poor girl is her father’s only child!’ The crowd murmured approval, and rebuked the unlucky jester, while Portal rose in their estimation. ‘It’s the young lawyer,’ whispered one, and they began to regard him with a little awe.

By this, Mr. Simcox, a bent grey-haired man, had opened the door, and his daughter was carried into the house. The poor man was quite overcome with grief and anxiety, but a doctor who had been summoned soon reassured him as to his child’s safety. By means of stimulants and warmth she slowly revived, and at length the father was able to tell Oakburne and Portal, who had been waiting in the house, that she was out of danger.

‘I don’t know how to express my gratitude to you, sir,’ said the schoolmaster to Oakburne, with tears in his eyes. ‘She is my only one, Lois is all I have left me

now in the world, God bless you, sir—,' and his voice broke.

'I am only too thankful,' replied Wilfrid with emotion, 'that I was able to save her,' and he grasped the hand offered to him by the other and shook it in silence.

'By heavens ! it was a noble act,' cried Portal. 'But look here my dear fellow, you musn't stay here any more in those clothes or you'll be laid up.'

'Yes ; I think I'll get home now,' said Oakburne. 'I shall come here to-morrow, Mr. Simcox,' added he, and the pair bade the schoolmaster adieu and walked together in silence to the end of the street, whence their roads lay in opposite directions.

'I can't tell you how much I admire your pluck, Oakburne,' said Portal, as he shook hands with him. 'I——.' He looked as though he would have said something more, but suddenly checked himself, and Wilfrid noticed a suppressed anxiety in his manner very different to the tone of condescending banter that he usually adopted towards him.

'Pooh ! my good sir ! you make too much of it ; you would have tried to save her yourself if you had been in my place, Portal.'

'I don't know that,' replied the other. 'Good-bye. Simcox will never forget you all his life for what you have done,' and again shaking Wilfrid warmly by the hand, he turned and walked rapidly away.

'After all, Portal's not such a bad fellow,' said Wilfrid to himself as he changed his wet clothes.

CHAPTER VII.

In which Wilfrid takes his departure for London.

Frail creatures are we all ! To be the best,
Is but the fewest faults to have :—
Look thou then to thyself, and leave the rest
To God, thy conscience, and the grave.—COLERIDGE.

BOTH Mrs. Oakburne and her daughter were naturally well pleased and not a little proud of Wilfrid's exploit; and they were still further delighted—the pleasure being the greater because it was unexpected—when he announced his determination to recommence his medical studies at once, and made arrangements for going to London to do so some ten days later. To have a hero in the family circle is very enjoyable no doubt, but if one is burdened with the expense of providing his armour and steed, and feasts to set before him, one is apt to forget his heroism at times, or at least to wish it could be the means of maintaining him. It may be questioned whether the honest burghers and yeomen who supplied the wherewithal for the gallant knights of the middle ages fully appreciated the noble deeds of those lights of chivalry. Wilfrid, it is true, was not, poor fellow, by any means extravagant in his drafts on the general purse. But, do what he would, his mother could ill afford to support him, and she and Ethel were for that reason, and also it is only fair to add, for his own sake, very glad to learn that he had not only made such

good resolutions—to which they were only too well accustomed—but was actually carrying them out. Wilfrid himself could not help feeling well satisfied at the course he had taken, and set to work to make the necessary preparations and say good-bye to his friends in the place.

One of his first cares was to go and ascertain how the girl whom he had saved from drowning was progressing. The rain was falling heavily as he walked towards Mr. Simcox's cottage; the hills were shrouded in mist, and wet and almost deserted pavements, over which occasional passengers hurried beneath protecting umbrellas, made the scene the reverse of cheering. Wilfrid was therefore somewhat surprised to see Miss Elkfield suddenly step out from a shop he was passing. She greeted him warmly and complimented him on his feat of the day before.

'Its dreadful weather for you to be out in,' said Oakburne.

'Oh! you know I never mind rain,' replied the young lady. 'Where are you going to? Do come to luncheon and tell us all about your saving the girl. It was really very brave of you!'

Wilfrid felt more pleased than he cared to show, and could not resist the temptation.

'I shall be very glad to come after I've been to the Simcox's cottage. I am just going to enquire how the girl is going on.'

'Mind you don't forget!' said Miss Elkfield, and he went on his way much elated. 'After all I won't give up hope yet!' said he to himself. 'Perhaps some day when I've got on in the world she'll care for me yet! Anyhow, Portal has'nt saved anyone's life! I've beaten

him there !' With which cheering thought he knocked at the door of the cottage.

It was opened by Lois Simcox herself. She started back with a flush when she saw who it was. Her father was away, she said, teaching the children. Would he mind coming in? Yes! she was all right again now, she continued, placing a chair for him before the fire, and then she thanked him very warmly for the service he had rendered her.

'I shall never cease to be grateful to you all my life, Mr. Oakburne,' said she. 'I can never repay you for what you have done, or make you know how thankful I am!' and the tears rose in her eyes. They were very beautiful eyes, Wilfrid observed; grey, large, oval-shaped, and with a peculiarly touching expression of sadness in them. A young man cannot help noting such details when he is face to face with a young woman who is pouring out her gratitude to him, and more especially if, like Wilfrid, he has a strong artistic appreciation for beauty. He also noticed that her dark brown hair was modestly braided back, and that her dress, though very quiet, was very tasteful, and showed off to advantage her tall, graceful figure. In short, having never before taken the trouble to notice her, he was almost surprised to see how handsome she was.

'You really magnify what I did too much!' cried he. 'Everyone does. No man worth his salt could have stood by and seen you in such danger without making an effort. You don't know how thankful I am that I was able to save you! It was rather a chance once though. I thought we should not have reached the bank.'

‘Ah!’ replied she, ‘you don’t know all,’ and she turned aside with a little sob.

‘How do you mean all?’ asked Wilfrid, thinking to himself that her voice was very musical.

‘Tell me, Mr. Oakburne,’ said she eagerly, leaning towards him with clasped hands, ‘did you—tell me honestly—did you see me—I mean did you see me fall into the water?’

‘Yes,’ replied he, after a moment’s hesitation, ‘I saw you throw yourself into the water.’

She covered her face with her hands, and cried with a bitterness that alarmed him.

‘Never mind Lois!’ cried he, unconsciously calling her by her christian name. ‘Never mind! It is all right now. No one saw you but me, and I was careful to say that you had fallen into the river. No other human being shall ever know it but me. I swear to you that I will tell no one. Don’t grieve over it now. I will keep your secret. You were unhappy I could see, and half beside yourself.’

‘You have saved me from committing a terrible sin, and God help you for it!’ cried Lois. ‘You can never know my sorrow. Perhaps—perhaps if you did—if you knew all the truth, you might think I had some excuse. Never mind now. I hear my father’s step. For Heaven’s sake say nothing to him! He is so fond of me.’

Wilfrid was sorry, and yet rather relieved, when the entrance of the schoolmaster put an end to this interview. He said a few words to the latter, congratulating him on his daughter’s recovery, and then took his leave of the pair.

What reason could such a quiet, nice, pretty girl have had for attempting to commit suicide, he said to himself

as he walked towards the Elkfield's house. What sorrow could it be that led her to such a desperate remedy? It could not be insanity. She was [as sane as he was himself.

'None the worse for your ducking?' said a voice close beside him, as an arm was slipped into his.

'None the worse, Portal, thanks,' he replied, as they walked onwards. 'I am going to lunch with Elkfields.'

'Oh! I envy you!' said Portal, with a little laugh. 'Pretty amusing girl, Miss Beatrice, very! Now I, poor beggar! am on my way to the office to wade through a lot of greasy savings bank accounts.'

He was manager and secretary of the Lidfield Savings Bank, which adjoined the offices of his firm.

'How is poor Lois Simcox going on?' enquired he.

'Oh! I've just been there,' said Wilfrid. 'I'm glad to say she's much better.'

'I am very glad, indeed, to hear that—very glad,' said Portal fervently. 'Ah! you may be thankful you were able to save her, Oakburne! I say, do you know you are in the *Hillshire Post*? Yes, its a fact, I assure you. A good long paragraph too; *Daring Act of Heroism at Lidfield* they call it. Mind you get a copy. I must be off; I'm late,' and he hurried away to his business.

'The *Hillshire Post*!' thought Wilfrid, half amused and half annoyed. 'How absurd! But it won't do one any harm. Not a bad fellow, Portal. Very benevolent of him to take such an interest in Lois. I shouldn't have expected it of such a hard, business-like sort of man. He's too free and easy though the fellow. 'Pretty, amusing girl, Miss Beatrice!' confound his impudence! How handsome that girl Lois is! if she

were a lady she'd be as much admired as Beatrice Elkfield,' and so thinking, he entered the Elkfield's house, where an abundance of compliments awaited him.

'So, so! Mr. Wilfrid! You're a fine fellow! pulling pretty girls out of the water! You're sure you didn't push her in first on purpose, eh? Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr. Elkfield, a stout, jovial, and somewhat coarse-looking personage. He was a very shrewd, energetic, man of business, who had turned the considerable capital left to him to such good account that he was now growing to be one of the richest men in the county. He had a kindly regard for all the Oakburnes on account of the early connection between the two families, though he thought Wilfrid too lazy and too much of a dreamer to get on in the world, and felt rather irritated that the young man should have chosen to fall in love with his daughter, of whom he was extremely fond, and for whom he had certain vague ambitious views of his own.

'How can you say such things, Mr. Elkfield!' cried his wife, a kindly lady now rather portly but bearing the remains of great beauty. She, on the contrary, was rather fond of young Oakburne, and sympathised with his evident admiration for her daughter. 'Tell us all about it, Wilfrid,' and the young man has once more to recount the episode of which he is getting thoroughly weary.

'Wasn't it brave of him, mamma!' says her daughter. 'You know it's in the *Hillshire Post* as an "act of daring heroism." He's quite a public character.'

'He did it for the sake of an uncommon pretty girl!' chimes in Mr. Elkfield, with a sly chuckle at Wilfrid.

'An uncommon pretty girl is Lois. Hey, Wilfrid!'

'I don't think she is a bit,' cries Mrs. Elkfield. 'She's

no more colour than the tablecloth. Do *you* admire her, Wilfrid?’

‘I think she’s not bad looking. But she’s not the style of face I care about,’ and Wilfrid glances nervously at Beatrice.

‘Oh you *do* admire her then,’ cries the latter.

‘You wouldn’t have done so much for Miss Trixy there I’ll be bound. Hey! would you now?’ asked the jovial Mr. Elkfield, pointing laughingly to his daughter.

‘I daresay not!’ says she pouting.

‘Wouldn’t I though!’ cried Wilfrid, with quite indignant fervour. ‘I only wish I had the chance! I hope I should be always ready to do a great deal more than that for Miss Beatrice,’ and in his excitement he nearly upset his sherry on his roast chicken.

‘Really!’ and Beatrice blushes and looks very pleased. ‘Ha! ha! ha!’ laughed Mr. Elkfield, who enjoyed a joke, and took care that it was very seldom against him. ‘Ha! ha! well I’m sure I hope you won’t be called upon to do it. Eh? Never mind Wilfrid, here’s your health! What are you drinking? Sherry. Take a glass of port. It’ll do you good, man! There’s no wine like it. George (to the butler), give Mr. Oakburne some port. My father, sir, never drank anything else but port, and he took his two bottles every night. And mind you, that was not much for a man in his days, as times went then, you understand.’

‘Oughtn’t you to be going off to the Savings Bank, papa?’ says his wife after a little pause. ‘Sir Joseph Boarsby will be waiting for you; and he’s always testy at being kept you know.’

‘Let him be testy, then!’ cried her spouse with some warmth, though, to tell the truth, he wouldn’t have

offended Sir Joseph Boarsby for the world. 'People must consult other people's convenience, madam. Who's Sir Joseph Boarsby, I should like to know, that he should be treated differently from other people, eh? Though he's a worthy man, a very worthy man! and I am glad we've got him as one of the trustees. He's an old family is Boarsby, one of the best in the county, and member for the boro' too; and people think a deal of that, eh Wilfrid?'

Wilfrid owned that they did.

'Well, I suppose I must be going, for that Savings Bank requires my attention. It's a noble institution! Your grandfather and my father had the founding of it, Wilfrid, and it's the oldest and best in the county. It is a duty; I feel it is a duty, sir,' continues he, 'a duty on the part of the rich to encourage thrifty habits in the poor. Do you understand?'

'Yes! that's very true,' says Wilfrid, glancing involuntarily round the well-furnished room, and at the well-appointed table at which he was seated.

'It was thrift got my father his money,' continued Mr. Elkfield, 'thrift, and a good business head, and steady habits. He always rose at six to the day of his death.'

'I don't call two bottles of port every night steady habits, do you?' says Beatrice irreverently to Oakburne.

'Yes! yes!' continued her father, not heeding her, 'That's what you young fellows should bear in mind, Wilfrid. Hey? steadiness and thrift. There's young Portal now, whom we find so invaluable at the bank. He's a steady fellow and a shrewd fellow. Well educated too; been at Oxford and got the what-dye-call-um—'

'Got his degree you mean, papa,' said Beatrice.

‘Well at any rate he’s got a very good opinion of himself.’

‘I think you are too hard on him, Miss Elkfield,’ says Wilfrid, with hypocritical sympathy for the absent.

‘That’s right, Wilfrid. Of course she is,’ cries Mr. Elkfield, rising to go. ‘A man should always think well of himself, and make the most of himself. Make yourself at home my boy. Good-bye, remember me to your mother. And, I say, don’t you go picking too many pretty girls out of the water. Hey? We shall have Miss Trix falling in to try what its like. Ha, ha!’ and chuckling to himself he bustled off to superintend the business of thrift at the Savings Bank.

‘We must show Wilfrid the conservatory, Beatrice,’ said Mrs. Elkfield. ‘Perhaps he can give us some suggestions,’ and she told him that they were going to have a dance on Beatrice’s birthday, and were making preparations.

‘You must come,’ said Beatrice, as they went together towards the conservatory, while Mrs. Elkfield, who had conveniently forgotten something, returned to the dining-room.

‘It will be the night before I go,’ replied he.

‘Never mind, its my birthday! You must come,’ said the young lady, with pretty insistence.

‘Oh! of course, if you say I must,’ said Wilfrid gallantly.

‘Do you know I am beginning to get very tired of balls and gaiety,’ said Miss Elkfield suddenly, with an unusual expression of sadness on her handsome face.

‘Why?’ asked her companion with a new interest, awakened by her melancholy.

‘Why? Well I can hardly tell you. I often think what a useless, selfish life one leads.’

‘I’ve often felt that,’ said Wilfrid, ‘and that is one reason why I’m glad I am going away and going to try and do something. Even if it ends in nothing its better to make an effort.’

‘Of course it is,’ said Beatrice eagerly. ‘Every man should try. You are quite right. So you are very glad you are going way?’ she added, glancing at him.

The imputation was too much for this ardent lover. ‘Glad! How can you say so? O Beatrice! you know I hate it,’ cries he, taking her hand.

‘Hush!’ said the young lady laughing and blushing. ‘Here comes mamma! ‘Don’t be stupid, please! Mamma, Mr. Oakburne has no ideas to give us! he’s really very dense! But he has promised to give us the pleasure of his company on Tuesday week instead.’

‘You are very rude, Beatrice,’ said her mother reprovingly. ‘I am glad you are coming, Wilfrid. I took it as a matter of course that you would. It will look very pretty, don’t you think so?’

Wilfrid expressed the necessary admiration at the various preparations, and after a little more general conversation took his leave more in love than ever. ‘This dance shall decide my fate,’ he said to himself as he strode homewards, and so pre-occupied was he, that he ran into and very nearly knocked over Mr. Simcox, whom he met at the outskirts of the town. ‘I am very sorry. I was thinking of other things,’ said he apologetically, and then the schoolmaster, when he had recovered his breath, explained that he had been anxious to meet him in order to ask for the loan of a certain book which he much wanted to consult. ‘I should not have

ventured to do so,' said he, 'did I not know, sir, that you take an interest in the work on the history of Lidfield, which I am trying to compile.'

Wilfrid gladly complied with his request and promised to send him the book next morning.

The next morning, however, he thought that after all he might as well take the book himself. He could explain certain points to Mr. Simcox; and it would be only civil to enquire after Lois, who certainly looked delicate. So it ended in his going and finding Mr. Simcox away at his work, and in his having another very pleasant tête-a-tête with his daughter till he returned.

Such interviews are apt to be dangerous when the lady happens to be pretty and owes a heavy debt of gratitude to the gentleman, and the danger in this case was not lessened by the fact that Lois was not only clever, but decidedly superior to, as well as better educated than, most of her class. The foundations of an intimacy were laid which increased more rapidly than either was aware of. It was, of course, accidental that Oakburne, having learnt that the schoolmaster's daughter was in the habit of walking by the river, should also take that road and meet her, and that these meetings should lead to others. Wilfrid, as may be supposed, was at first quite unconscious of the perils he was incurring; nor did he dream for a moment that his devotion for Beatrice Elkfield was in any way influenced by his conduct. The idea of injuring a girl in Lois's position never entered his brain; and, on the other hand, to be listened to with admiration by one whom he was conscious of having inspired with very warm feelings of gratitude, was so pleasant as almost to forbid any thoughts of ill consequences. The fact that he had hitherto felt himself

rather an object of toleration, made this sudden elevation inexpressibly agreeable to his self-love, and the desire to make the most of it was increased by the failure of all the attempts he made to see Beatrice during this period. His shyness prevented him from calling again so soon at the house, and his efforts to meet her elsewhere were fruitless. In vain did he frequent the paths he knew she was wont to take, and the streets in which were shops which Miss Elkfield honoured with her custom. In vain did he haunt the ash wood near the house. The only result was to see Portal constantly entering its gates, and to make him anathematize the latter's impudence and his own timidity. At last, as his precious time grew shorter and shorter, he in desperation screwed up all his courage and called one afternoon.

Of course, he found his rival already there, superintending the arrangements for the dance to take place two days later. Everybody seemed to appeal to Portal, and especially Beatrice ; and Portal seemed provokingly capable of doing whatever he was asked—a sort of Admirable Crichton in all relating to carpentering, lighting, and decorating. What did Mr. Portal think of this way of managing the lights ? Would he come and see how the supper-table was to be laid out ? Was he satisfied with the arrangement of the flowers in the conservatory ? And Portal was giving orders everywhere in his deep, authoritative voice, bullying the workmen and servants, and directing everyone and everything. ‘Why did I never get up carpentering and this sort of thing ?’ said poor Wilfrid to himself. Even good-natured Mrs. Elkfield had hardly a word to say to him, and he felt thoroughly disgusted.

‘I feel I am only in the way, Miss Elkfield,’ he said grumpily to that young lady. ‘So I’ll say goodbye.’

‘In the way!—how can you say so?’ Do stay! replied she, very kindly, and stopping in her task of arranging flowers.

‘Portal is doing all that is required,’ said Wilfrid, savagely. His jealousy had got the better of him, and he chose to think he was slighted.

‘What do you mean, Mr. Oakburne?’ cried Beatrice, angrily.

‘I mean that while Portal is making himself so useful, I consider my presence *de trop*.’

‘Then you had certainly better not remain,’ was the tart reply, and Wilfrid, with a restrained shake-hands, walked savagely away. He did not look back; so he did not see that Miss Elkfield’s eyes filled with tears at what she considered his unkindness, nor catch the regretful look with which she watched his tall figure pass down the drive to the gate. He went home very angry and hopeless, and the next afternoon he and Lois were again wandering by the river.

‘I shall never be able to forget that bend of the river, Mr. Oakburne,’ said the schoolmaster’s daughter, pointing to the distant woods, and gazing at them with sad, wistful eyes.

‘I wish you would call me Wilfrid,’ said he, taking her hand. ‘I have not got many friends. You are one of the best.’

Lois gave a sudden start. ‘Hush!’ said she. ‘Who is that?’ A man came striding down the path. ‘Ha! Oakburne. How are you?’ It was Portal, and Wilfrid felt he could have pitched him into the river. The man was his evil genius!—always crossing him! He seemed,

however, hardly to have noticed them, and walked on rapidly towards the town.

Lois had turned deadly pale. 'I hate that man!' cried she between her clenched teeth. Wilfrid looked at her in astonishment, her face seemed so suddenly changed. 'Why?' he asked.

'I can hardly tell you,' replied she, recovering herself with an effort. 'I mistrust him.'

'I can't say I like him; but I know nothing against him,' said Wilfrid; and he wondered where she got her knowledge.

'Let us go home now,' said she, after a pause, and they retraced their way in silence.

'Wilfrid, beware of that man Portal. I am sure he is a bad man.' It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and Oakburne started. He pressed her hand silently, but he went home feeling, he knew not why, a little distrustful of Lois.

From this time he carefully avoided walking by the river, and occupied himself at home with preparations for his departure. Both his mother and sister noticed that he was gloomy and absent-minded, and put it down to regret at going away.

'Poor boy! he feels leaving us,' said Ethel. 'I don't think he ought to go to the Elkfields' dance. Beatrice is such a terrible little flirt. I expect we shall hear of her being engaged to young Mr. Portal!'

Mrs. Oakburne, who thought her daughter had herself rather a *penchant* for the latter gentleman, shook her head. 'Never mind that, my dear! It will cheer him up,' said she, 'and as you are going, it is as well he should.'

Though Mrs. Elkfield's ball much resembled that

given by Mrs. Perkins and other folks who have given balls from time immemorial, it was a very important event in the eyes of that lady and her husband, as well as in those of one or two of her guests. To begin with, it marked an era in the rise, which had been very gradual, of the Elkfield family on the social ladder. Sir Joseph Boarsby and other well-recognised county people who attended it, were accustomed as children to hear their parents talk of old Elkfield, Beatrice's grandfather, as 'the wool man,' a worthy creature perhaps, but one that no one of their set would ever think of as a social equal. But when his heir increased the wealth left to him, and was made Mayor of Lidfield, and grew to be an influential personage and a capitalist, the magnates of the county began to look more kindly on him, and to ask whether a man who had so many votes at his disposal, and no particular politics, had not atoned for his father's defects. It was discovered too that Mrs. Elkfield was of a good family (all the members of which, by the way, she had mortally offended by marrying her husband), and really very nice; and that Beatrice, on whose education no money had been spared, was decidedly good-looking and clever, quite presentable, and—an only child. So when Lady Lydlenesse called, and then Lady Boarsby (the wife of the Tory member), also thought it right to visit the wife of a man whom Sir Joseph was always meeting on the Bench and in business matters at Lidfield, all the less important families who had hitherto held aloof,—like the Bolderwoods of Slopley, and the Snipingtons of Marshmire Park,—followed suit, and now, after years of patient waiting, Elkfield and his wife had the happiness of seeing all the best society in the neighbourhood dancing at their ball.

Lord Lydlenesse had condescended to be present, bringing with him a large party, among whom was Giles Rowancourt, Lord Ashleigh's son ; the Boarsbys had brought another party, and in short, they had achieved a great social success.

Then, too, it was very pleasant to the parents to see the good impression their daughter made. It was her twenty-first birthday, as has been said, and she could not but feel gratified by the attentions paid to her as one of the prettiest and richest girls in the neighbourhood.

There were, however, two of Miss Elkfield's admirers who watched her with a pleasure, a good deal disturbed by less agreeable feelings, and the emotions of one of whom may be best described in the language of the poet as 'sorrow touch'd with joy.' Both of them felt disheartened and alarmed at the brilliant rivals whom they saw paying court to their idol, and who they knew held them but in small esteem. Though caste is not such a serious thing in England as in India, it is certainly an element of power not to be overlooked in English society, and though the élite of Hillshire might condescend to dance to Mrs. Elkfield's music, it was but natural that they should ignore the less distinguished friends, whom she in the fulness of her heart had invited, but whom they knew nothing about. 'What a queer lot of people !' 'Who is that extraordinary looking man ?' 'Can you tell me who that funnily-dressed girl is ?' were the sort of comments that showed where the hostess had failed in what was in the main a most successful ball. Of the two above-mentioned observers of Miss Elkfield's triumph, Portal was, as the reader will suppose, far less disturbed by it than Wilfrid Oakburne. He was very ambitious, and had long since

made up his mind if possible to win the hand of Beatrice, whom he really admired, and whose money and friends would he felt give him just the sort of help he needed in his career. He was decidedly clever and agreeable, and had managed to make himself very useful not only to the young lady, but to her parents, while he possessed an amount of patience and energy which, combined with a freedom from scruples of any kind, and a cool calculating brain, made him succeed in most of his undertakings. Though, therefore, he felt startled when he saw Rowan-court, a widower old enough to be her father, paying considerable attention to Miss Elkfield, and felt irritated by the marked admiration shewn for her by young Snipington of Marshmire Park (who was just of age and had a considerable property), he consoled himself with thinking that old Elkfield was too shrewd to think of flying at such high game, and dismissed his jealousies as not worth sensible consideration. He was in truth far more afraid of young Oakburne as a rival, for he thought he had noticed in Beatrice a decided liking for him. Though therefore he seldom indulged in the foolish luxury of disliking anyone, and had no other feeling towards Wilfrid than a good-natured contempt (in fact he rather liked him than otherwise as a good-tempered, harmless creature), he felt it advisable to speak always slightly of him to Beatrice, and to endeavour to lower him in her estimation. This led him to take the opportunity on this occasion of telling her of the growing intimacy between Lois and Oakburne, and of the conversation he had overheard when he came upon them by the river. 'Women always enjoy scandal,' he said to himself, 'and even if she's angry with me for the time it will considerably damage Master Wilfrid in her good graces.' She

listened to him at first in evident surprise and anger, and indignantly discredited the idea; then she affected to make light of it, and then towards the end of their dance manifested a little ill-concealed anxiety to know if it was really true. Portal felt sure he had succeeded in his object, and attributed the fact that he was actually allowed to put his name down for another dance to her mingled disquietude and curiosity.

Meanwhile poor Wilfrid, quite unaware of the means thus taken to prejudice his suit, was waiting with gloomy resignation for the happiness of waltzing with the object of his adoration, and suffering bitter pangs of jealousy and despair. 'How can a such luckless nobody as I, without money or friends, hope to gain such a prize!' said he to himself as he watched those more favoured by fortune dancing and flirting with her. At last, however, the long-wished for moment came. Wilfrid, like many tall men, waltzed well, and when the felicity of whirling round the room had left them well-contented but rather out of breath, he led Miss Elkfield into the spacious conservatory, artistically lighted with many-coloured lanterns half-hidden among the plants. He was pleased to note that by good luck it happened just now to be empty.

'Isn't it pretty?' said his partner. 'Yes! It was my idea chiefly, though I'm bound to say Mr. Portal improved on it.' Wilfrid winced. 'And so you are really going away to-morrow! I suppose you will often run down here?'

'Often run down!' said Wilfrid, gloomily. 'Perhaps once or twice in the year for a week! One might as well be at the other end of the world for all I shall see of—of Lidfield!'

'Well, I suppose you are going to be very busy; and

that will be quite enough for you,' said the young lady, with a slight smile, playing indifferently with her fan. 'A change to London, too, must be delightful!' added she. 'I quite envy you! Look! there is Mr. Rowancourt! He waltzes divinely, though he is so bald! They say he is so horribly wicked! Do you know anything about him?'

'I daresay a week in the year will be quite enough for my friends,' replied Wilfrid, bitterly, quite ignoring Rowancourt's existence. 'I don't expect any one to miss me. There are plenty of young men in Lidfield; a man like Portal must be a host in himself. What a treasure you must have found him!'

The sneering tone which it seemed good to Wilfrid to adopt made Miss Elkfield very angry. This was the second time he had chosen to make these remarks about Portal. 'This is too rude, Mr. Oakburne!' cried she, with a flushed face and trembling tones. 'I think you had better take me back to the drawing-room, if you please.' And she rose as if to go.

'Stay, I beseech you! I beg your pardon most sincerely!' cried Wilfrid. But she would not be thus appeased.

'Mr. Portal is certainly never impertinent!' said she 'and that cannot be said of Mr. Wilfrid Oakburne. Perhaps, however, when walking with his *chief friend* by the river he is more polite. I suppose Lois Simcox inspires more courteous behaviour!'

'Beatrice! it is false! I know now who has been slandering me! But you will not be so unfair as to judge me unheard? Say that you do not believe this!' and he took her hand in his eagerness, and looked at her with imploring eyes.

‘Silence, Mr. Oakburne ! you have no right to call me Beatrice !’ cried the young lady, struggling to free herself.

‘No ! I will not be silent, Beatrice !’ answered he, passionately. ‘I love you. You know how I have loved you ever since I was a boy !—ever since I was a child, I think ! I have thought of no one but you, and my love has grown with your growth and become part of me. I cannot leave without having your answer. The future of my life depends on it. I have been jealous—angry—mad ! Forgive me. I can’t help it. I love you,’ and he poured forth a torrent of protestations of affection and penitence to which Beatrice listened with half-averted face. The strains of the prelude to a galop began to be heard in the ball-room, and a well-known form appeared at the far end of the conservatory and came towards them.

‘Beatrice ! answer me ! Give me some hope !’ But still Beatrice did not speak, though her hand still remained in his.

‘Ha ! I see how it is ! You prefer this man to me !’ cried Wilfrid, in sudden fury, as he saw it was Portal who approached them. ‘Enough ! you must choose between him and me ! If you dance with him, I shall accept it as your answer and know my fate !’

‘Wilfrid ! Mr. Oakburne ! I cannot suffer this !’ cried Beatrice, stung by his manner, and angrily snatching her hand from him. ‘You are unkind and ungenerous, and deserve no answer,’ added she in a lower tone tremulous with emotion, and growing suddenly very pale.

‘This is ours, Miss Elkfield, I think,’ said Portal, airily examining his card. ‘No. 13—a galop.’

‘Yes,’ replied she, very quietly, and, bowing coldly to

Oakburne, she left him, leaning on the arm of her partner. 'I have settled your hash, my friend,' thought the latter to himself as he gave Wilfrid a half-amused, half-malicious nod.

'How pale he looks, poor boy!' whispered Ethel to her mother as Oakburne, after telling them that he should walk home at once to try and get some rest, quitted the room. Mrs. Elkfield agreed with her, and thought her son had done wisely in leaving. As, however, Ethel was anxious to stay for two or three more dances, and she herself was engaged in discussing family history with one of the Miss Bolderwoods of Slopley, who no longer cared for the giddy dance, they still remained on.

'So ends my happiness!' said Wilfrid, bitterly, as he walked homewards. 'What a fool I have been! What chance had a fellow like me! And yet I fancied she cared for me!' But the thought of Portal changed his emotion to anger. 'Heartless little flirt! she was not worth it! Well, she shall not break my heart. I will show her I can despise her!'

He had reached the outskirts of the town, and stopt for a moment to look back. It was a beautifully still, clear night, and amongst the trees he could see the distant lights in the Elkfields' house, and almost thought he could hear the faint tones of the music. 'It does not matter now what I do, or what happens to me!' said he with a groan as he walked slowly onwards.

'Who could that be in the little garden of the Simcox's house? A woman, surely? He quickened his pace and approached the wicket gate. 'Lois!' cried he in astonishment as he recognized the schoolmaster's daughter. 'Lois! how is it you are here now?'

'Hush!' said she, in a whisper. 'My father has been

poorly, and I have been sitting up with him. He is asleep now, and I came out because I could not rest, and it is such a lovely night.' She was standing close by the little gate ; Wilfrid opened it and stood beside her.

'It is a glorious night,' said he, 'but the sight of so much beauty only adds to a man's sorrow if he is unhappy.'

'Are you unhappy?' asked she.

'As unhappy as a man can be, Lois, who has no hopes and no friends.'

It is remarkable how one sorrow or disappointment can immediately obliterate from a man's mind all the good things that God has given him !

'Well, you'll have one friend always, if I am any good,' said Lois.

'Will you be my friend then, Lois?' he asked, coming nearer to her and taking her hand. 'I am going away to-morrow. God knows whether I shall ever come back. You will be my friend?'

'Always,' answered she, and he could see that there were tears in her eyes. She looked very beautiful as she stood there, and as he looked at her he remembered how but half-an-hour ago he had been pleading with Beatrice and received no answer but implied denial of his petition. A mad thought came into his angry heart. He would show Beatrice that he despised her.

'Lois,' whispered he suddenly, 'will you love me? will you marry me?'

'Love you!' cried she with a start.

'You must and shall love me,' he said, passionately ; and before she could prevent him he had taken her in his arms and kissed her.

'For God's sake Wilfrid, don't!' cried she in a voice

so piteous that he released her. 'You don't know all ! you don't know what I am !'

'Know what you are !' said he, retaining her hands. 'I know you are poor. What of that ? So am I. Accident has placed me in another rank of life. I don't care for that ; you are better than any woman in my own. Say you love me, Lois !'

'Never !' she cried almost fiercely, 'Never ! You must not, shall not love such as I ! You do not know your folly ! I will not let you love me. Listen, here closer !' and she whispered two or three words in his ear which caused Oakburne to drop her hand and start back as if he had been shot. 'My God !' he cried, 'Is this true ! Oh, the villainy ! Lois, say it is not true !'

'It is as true as that we both stand in the sight of Heaven,' she replied solemnly, in a quivering voice, 'could I have told you such a thing if it was not ?'

Wilfrid covered his face with both hands. 'I believe you,' he said at last, after a long pause. 'Poor soul ! I see it all now ! God knows how I pity you, and how I honour you for your truth and courage in speaking to me !'

Lois sobbed. 'If you knew all, you would not blame me,' said she.

'I blame you ! You know I do not !' cried he eagerly. 'Lois, promise me that if you ever want a friend you will come to me.'

'I promise.'

'And promise me solemnly you will never again think for a moment of committing the terrible sin from which I saved you !'

'I promise faithfully,' she murmured through her tears.

‘God bless you! Remember, trust me always!’ He pressed her hand warmly.

The girl raised his to her lips and her hot tears fell upon it. ‘Goodbye, Wilfrid,’ she cried with a sob, ‘and Heaven be with you.’

She watched him walk rapidly down the street, and then going to her room, fell on her knees in an agony of weeping.

The next morning Oakburne took his departure for London. His mother and sister accompanied him to the station, and just as she was going to say good-bye, Ethel remembered that she had forgotten to give her brother a note which had come for him that morning from the Elkfields.

‘Just like you, Ethel,’ said her brother maliciously, but just then the train began to move off, and he had to bid them a hurried adieu. When they were well out of the station he opened the note, which was a brief one, evidently written in a hurry.

‘Dear Wilfrid,’ it ran, ‘Forgive me if I seemed unkind last night. I was vexed at what you said, and you misunderstood me altogether. I do not believe anything against you about Lois. Will you forgive me?’

Yours very truly, Beatrice Elkfield.’

‘P.S.—You are not to answer this or you will offend me very much. Answer it in person when you return.’

Of course Wilfrid read this precious missive over two or three times, and then placed it very carefully in his breast pocket. Of course, too, it raised his spirits immediately, and made the world in general appear in a totally new and deliciously bright light to the world he had awoke to in the morning. How long the time would seem before he answered this almost sacred note

in person ! But now there would be something to work for, and hope would make work seem easy and time short ! Then he remembered Lois. Ah ! what a narrow escape he had had ! How good and true she had been to him ! He should always feel she was a dear, true friend. Poor, poor Lois ! these conflicting thoughts fully occupied him during his journey to London.

CHAPTER VIII.

In which Giles Rowancourt makes a discovery.

To beguile the time,
Look like the time ; bear welcome in your eyes,
Your hand, your tongue ; look like the innocent flower ;
But be the serpent under it.—SHAKESPEARE.



AMONG those who travelled by the train which took Wilfrid Oakburne to London, was Giles Rowancourt, who has been more than once alluded to in these pages. That gentleman had concluded his visit to Lady Thistledale, and was on his way to visit his sister at Otterstone Hall ; and as he alighted at the small station where passengers had to change for Thornbury, Oakburne recognised him, and recalled how Beatrice had pointed him out the night before with the enquiry ‘whether it was true that he, Rowancourt, was horribly wicked.’ She used the phrase, as young ladies are apt to do, in a very vague manner, for in truth, neither she nor anyone else had ever heard him accused of any particular kind of ill-doing. His manners and appearance were on the contrary all in his favour. He was not indeed handsome, but he looked eminently a gentleman. His fair reddish hair was somewhat scanty for a man nearing fifty, he stooped slightly, and his light grey eyes and somewhat hard features were not attractive at first sight, yet he had that unmistakable air of good-breeding which is so easily

recognisable and so impossible to describe ; and anyone who had talked ten minutes with him, especially any woman, was sure to be favourably impressed. There were, it is true, people who spoke of him as ‘unscrupulous,’ ‘horribly selfish,’ ‘a mere man of pleasure,’ and so forth, but they were for the most part acquaintances who were glad enough to welcome him as a very pleasant member of society. As a young man, when he and Captain Chessington had been so intimate, he had undoubtedly been rather fast, and he still took great interest in the turf ; but the sowing of wild oats, when the sower is blessed with ample means for the process, is not an altogether exceptional occurrence among the members of good society. People said he had married for money, and, after driving his wife to leave him, spent all her fortune. But it was well known that the lady had eloped with an old lover shortly after her marriage, and the charge of ill-treatment quite broke down. She had died soon after, and though some said he showed want of spirit in not calling out her seducer, most people thought that Rowancourt had acted very sensibly in the matter. The incident was soon forgotten, and he was left to spend his wife’s money in peace. As he approached middle life the interest of the spending process rather flagged, and he settled down into a confirmed club man. Though he went a good deal into society, he devoted most of his time to whist, at which he was a great proficient, and when the clubs emptied at the end of the London season, betook himself to the numerous country-houses open to him. His connection with Horace Chessington had led him to take an interest in politics, and though he was not an orator, and far too fond of comfort to dream of entering Parliament himself, his large

circle of acquaintance made him a useful ally. Every man, however, as he advances in life, likes to have some harbour to which he can occasionally betake himself to rest and recruit at ease before beginning the business of life afresh, and is well content to have some human ties to satisfy the desire for affection which is to be found even in the lowest specimens of humanity. Giles Rowancourt's only real affections, so far as such a cold, calculating being could be said to possess any, were centered in his sister, Adela Chessington, and her children. On his brother-in-law's death, he endeavoured to the best of his power to assist her according to his own views of life, and it suited him very well, when feeling at all out of sorts or weary of society, to be able to retire to Otterstone for a little quiet and change. As time went on, these visits began to be more frequent. He felt rather proud, and for him fond, of his niece and nephew, and began to interest himself in their future; and it was with the object of, as he esteemed it, furthering Walter's advance in life that he was now on his way to Otterstone.

Neither Walter nor his sister altogether appreciated their uncle's benevolent feelings towards them, and, though they managed to get on very well with him when they were all assembled together, they neither of them looked forward with any extraordinary pleasure to his arrival. Notwithstanding this, however, after he had been in the house a couple of days, both had to acknowledge that his visit was an agreeable change in the monotony of their rather humdrum life. He talked so well about everything, knew so many people, and had such a fund of amusing and satirical stories about everyone who was anyone; and then, too, he made himself so pleasantly at home with all about him.

He was particularly kind to Catherine, whose good qualities and beauty pleased him as being in a way creditable to himself, and frequently praised her to her mother, regretting that Miss Chessington—who was very constant in visiting the poor—should, as he expressed it, ‘bury herself alive so much ; pottering about with these old women, you know.’

‘Upon my word, Adela,’ said he to his sister one morning—‘upon my word, Walter speaks uncommonly well. He has clearly a decided gift for that sort of thing, inherited, of course, from both sides. I was pleased to find last night that he has the taste, because I’ve been feeling for a long time that he ought to think of public life. His father, you know, came forward more than once, and Walter owes it to his position to do the same. What do you say to Parliament now, eh?’

‘Penny Readings’ were then coming into vogue, and it was the share taken by Walter—who had acquired a taste for declaiming at school and college, and frequently volunteered his services—in one held at Otterstone soon after Rowancourt’s arrival which gave rise to the above remarks from the latter. The reader perhaps would not have spoken so warmly in praise of young Chessington’s eloquence, but it gave Rowancourt a good opportunity of introducing the subject which had brought him to Otterstone.

‘Parliament, Giles!’ cried his sister laughing, but looking a little startled. ‘Nonsense, dear!’ She was a gentle, timid woman, easily led and easily frightened.

‘But supposing he had the chance?’

‘Supposing! Nonsense, Giles! Supposing he had, and had the capacity and the inclination too, I am sure his constitution never would stand the wear and tear!’

You don't know him as I do—as a mother must, my dear Giles !'

The suggestion really alarmed her, for to tell the truth she feared it would prove only too acceptable to Walter who, though pleasure-loving, was ambitious, and who frequently showed signs of weariness at the hum-drum country-life which he found it necessary to vary pretty often by visits to London and to country friends. Her life was centered in her children, and she thought this plan of her brother's sounded like a design to deprive her altogether of the son of whom she now saw only too little. 'Please don't put any such ideas into Walter's head, Giles,' she said.

'Nonsense, Adela !' replied her brother, smiling at her anxiety. 'There's no wear and tear at all, unless a man chooses to wear and tear himself; and the boy's as strong as a horse—as sound as possible ! Gad ! I wish I had his constitution ! Young men lead so much healthier lives—more exercise and all that—than we used to in my day. At least, Walter has. But he's just fitted for it ! He's had a public school education, been at the University, called to the Bar, travelled, and all that ! eh ? He's got money and position and that sort of thing you know, and any interest I can give him besides.'

'But Giles, dear——'

'Its just what he wants—a career, an object, don't you know—an object in life, eh ? And he's got some knowledge of law.'

'My dear Giles, he says he knows next to nothing about it ! He took one brief, which some friends got offered him, just because he was told it was the thing to do when he was called ; but he had nothing to say,

poor, dear boy ! as he's often told me, and drew pictures on the blotting-paper in front of him all the time ! He's often declared he hates the law, and he lent his wig and gown to the Walzingmore girls at Thorpe Ashton for private theatricals, and I believe they've never returned them yet. People are so forgetful.'

'Bless my soul, Adela !' said Rowancourt, rising and placing himself before the fire, 'what does it matter if he's not a sucking lawyer ! I like him all the better for it. I never cared much for the profession myself—too doosid keen don't you know, and too bookish for my taste. It would make no difference if he were as ignorant as Hopkins the butler—all that kind of thing is quite a secondary affair in cases of this kind. But Walter's had good training ; he's got views, one can see, takes an intelligent interest in questions, reads, and so on.'

'Nonsense !' murmured the fond mother, pleased against her will. 'It would never do Giles.'

'It's not nonsense at all my dear ! Now look here, the long and short of it is this. I've been staying at old Lady Thistledale's at Lidfield, and we've had to discuss the question of the seat for the boro'. You know we're great friends she and I,—she's a dreadfully imperious old creature,—and Walter's just the man we want.'

'Walter ! you don't really mean it, Giles.'

'Poor Joe Boarsby, the member for the boro', must die soon,' went on Rowancourt, not heeding the interruption.

'Oh Giles ! how can you speak so !' cries Lady Adela, looking very shocked.

'Eh, my dear ! yes ! very sad indeed, isn't it ! poor fellow. I know him well,—a very good fellow ! very ! It's fatty degeneration of the heart of course. His

mother was a Porkington you recollect—one of Lady Porkington's daughters, and they all inherited it from her. *He* was as sound as a bell—a great big stout creature with a face like a warmin' pan, by Jove! you must remember old Lord Porkington in the old days, eh? Yes, its very sad, but we must be prepared for these things. L'homme propose, you know, eh, Adela?

'I'm very shocked to hear it,' says Lady Adela, quickly. 'I think I remember something of him. I met him as a girl, you know.'

'Ah, yes! I daresay. Yes it's very sad. He's dying by inches, poor fellow. Not a doubt of it. The Tories will make a great fight to keep the seat, they've had it for generations you know; but Lady Thistledale wants to try and win it for our people, and all we want is a good candidate. They are working away quietly now, but so are we. We've brought over a splendid supporter—Elkfield he calls himself, owns a wool factory, and could buy up the whole place, has immense influence. A man like Walter, clever, and a gentleman, is just *the* thing we're looking out for.'

'My dear Giles! what do they know of poor Walter at Lidfield?'

'Know! nothing at all of course. All the better for us. No nasty stories about wild oats, or family affairs, and that sort of thing. Don't look so shocked. I've known great capital made out of such affairs at elections. No! Walter's just the man. I answer for him to Lady Thistledale, and she recommends him to the Lidfield people. It's a great thing you know in these Radical days to get a man who combines enlightened views and some experience, with gentle breeding, eh?'

'Well, Giles!' says his sister with a gentle sigh, 'you

of course must understand more of these matters than I do. And—and I know too well that Walter is clever and ambitious, and finds home dull sometimes. Walter will judge for himself of course. He'll soon be eight and twenty. Dear me! How time flies. I'm afraid, very much afraid he's not up to it.'

'Pooh, pooh, Adela! Be comforted, my dear! I'm quite convinced he is, or be sure, I shouldn't think of it. I have not spoken to him yet, of course. I would not dream of doing so, as you know, unless you approved, and I am very glad you agree with your old brother's project,' and he laid his hand affectionately on his sister's.

'I don't quite know that I do altogether approve, Giles,' said she. 'But—but I leave it to you, dear.'

'I am sure you may safely do so,' my dear Adela, for you know my affection for you both. By the way, I remember a long time ago Walter had some absurd penchant about that little Miss Beechcroft. A sort of eccentric scruple about the property, combined with a little spooniness about the girl if I'm not mistaken. He's quite got over that I suppose.'

'Oh yes, quite,' answered Walter's mother eagerly. 'Quite, I'm glad to say. It was only a boyish folly, and his own over-tenderness of conscience. He has got such a good heart, dear Walter. Oh yes, that's quite done with now. It was long ago, and you know they went to India last year.'

'Oh, ah yes! True! I remember now! Old Beechcroft burnt his fingers in that railway mania business and had to go into harness again. Great jobbery his getting that command. But they've good interest. His grandmother, you remember, was a

Hautton, and one of her sisters married old Marshal Glenshale. They were a good-lookin' lot the Hautton girls. But I never could stand the Glenshale people with that horrible frigid manner.'

'Well, Uncle Giles, are you ready to explore the tower?' said Catherine, who entered at this moment and interrupted Rowancourt's reminiscences. 'You promised you'd come. Just imagine mother, he's never been into the tower all these years. Isn't it lazy of him?'

'Dear me! Is that really the case, Giles,' said his sister. 'How very odd! But of course you never did care about that sort of thing, did you? After all dear, though they say its so old, its only a lumber-room now.'

'Upon my word I feel its very negligent of me,' said Rowancourt good-humouredly. 'Quite lazy as Catherine says. I don't believe I ever realised that it existed till she began talking about it last night. I must go or this young woman will never cease bullying her old uncle till I do. It'll be an excuse for a cigar too. Come along, Catherine! Where's Walter?' and putting his arm into his niece's they went out of the room together.

'I think he's an affectionate uncle,' said Lady Adela to herself, with a sigh. Dear me! I wonder what could have put parliament into his head. If it would not take Walter from us altogether I should like it. We are all so happy together now.'

She was really fond of her brother. He had stood by her during the trying period of her estrangement from her family after her runaway marriage; and as children they had always been together a good deal. She had a great belief in his sagacity and knowledge of the world, and reflected that when he became Lord Asheleigh—an

event which could not be very long deferred—he would be a great help to her children. He had often told her that he should leave all he possessed to them, and she felt sure he would ; for Rowancourt did not get on well with his mother and other sisters, and she could see that he liked both his nephew and niece as much as he ever liked anyone. Perhaps it was wisest to let him do what he wished ; Walter, she feared would be sure to agree with his uncle. So with another sigh she dismissed the subject from her mind and began to consider the more immediate question of who was to take who into dinner at the party arranged for the next day.

Anyone seeing the Hon. Giles Rowancourt as he sauntered along the broad terrace in front of the house in the sunshine of that bright April morning, would have thought him a model uncle, and perhaps have envied the nephew and niece who walked on either side of him. Being in a good-humour with himself and his surroundings, he managed to impart his pleasurable feelings to his companions as he chatted to them between the puffs of the fragrant cigar he was smoking. He dilated on the beauty of the timber, pointing out at the same time to Walter which trees he thought ought to be felled and sold. He complimented Catherine on the freshness of her colour, and rallied her playfully on what he was pleased to term her old-fashioned way of doing her hair. In short, he made himself thoroughly agreeable as they walked, with many pauses, towards the tower which was connected with the house by a long passage communicating with the kitchen and offices.

‘What a queer old relic of the past. How many times I must have passed it without thinking about it.

Positively I believe I hardly noticed it. So it belongs really to the times of the Tudors, Catherine, eh?’

‘The Tudors, no! Long before the Tudors, Uncle Giles, of course! Really you ought to have known better,’ says his niece. ‘It was built in the reign of Henry II., you know. I wish Mr. Bowersby was here to explain it all. He knows the history thoroughly.’

‘To be sure. Of course. Henry II. and all that! oh yes!’ said Uncle Giles, with whom history had never been a strong point. ‘Henry II. of course. And so Mr. Bowersby knows all about it, eh? A worthy man, but rather an old slow coach, I should imagine?’ added he, glancing at Catherine.

‘He’s very clever I believe,’ replied she, rather warmly, ‘and he’s not so very old. He can’t be more than seven or eight-and-thirty.’

‘And you don’t call that old! Ah, well! I suppose that’s a compliment to your old uncle! eh, Walter? I thought myself pretty old at seven-and-thirty I remember! Well, let us see what is to be seen.’

The lower portion of the tower, a grey, ivy-covered, two-storied building, had anciently been used as an armoury, but in recent times had been converted into two rooms, one of which was used as a wash-house, and the other as an apple-room—to ‘such base uses may we come!’ The upper part, however, was still one large circular-room, reached by a spiral stair-way outside the building.

‘You are not too old to get up the stair-case I hope, Uncle Giles,’ said Catherine laughing, as they ascended, and unlocking the massive oak door, entered the room. It was lighted by four windows so obscured by the pen-

dant ivy as to admit but a small proportion of the bright sunshine outside.

‘Now this room is all just as it used to be,’ said Catherine, ‘and this window is the one to which Sir Walter Throckmorton’s ghost points when anything is going to happen to the Oakburne family. You know the story, “This quaint fragment of legendary history,” as the county history says. “Sir Walter Oakburne and his friend, and relative by marriage” ’ —

‘Oh, ah, yes! You may spare me that, Catherine!’ said her uncle with a ludicrous expression of alarm. ‘I’m afraid to say how many times I’ve heard that unfortunate ghost story. The ghost’s off duty now that the Oakburnes have disappeared.’

‘I don’t know about the Oakburnes having disappeared,’ said Catherine laughing. ‘Mr. Bowersby declares he’s somehow distantly related to some of them, and he would have insisted on telling you the whole story from beginning to end if he’d been here.’

‘Then I’m not sorry he is not of the party. Odd that he should be related to the Oakburne’s though. How long is it now since this room was used?’

‘Poor George Chessington, my father’s uncle, is said to have been the last person who inhabited it,’ said Walter. He had long since accustomed himself to ignore, though he could never quite forget, the bar-sinister in his pedigree. His uncle looked approvingly at him.

‘Oh I did not know that,’ said he.

‘Yes,’ replied his nephew. ‘He did not get on well with Sir Pelham, his father you know, and it is said that after one of their differences he would pass two or three days here, having a bed placed in the room, and his meals sometimes brought to him. He was the one who

was killed at the siege of some hill fort in India, and after his death, which affected his father very much, the room was locked up.'

'Ah, yes! I recollect—a sad business, very! very sad! and that's how the property went to your grandfather.'

'Look, Uncle Giles,' said his niece, 'this trap door communicated with an underground passage that had an entrance somewhere, a mile away in the Thornbury Road; and they used to bring priests here to hide when Elizabeth and Edward VI. were persecuting the Roman Catholics. One was found concealed here after Sir Francis Oakburne had been beheaded for his share in Babbington's conspiracy.'

'Really! very interesting. How well up she is in her history, eh Walter? I suppose the passage has been closed now. What is that bureau there?'

'The passage, oh dear, yes! it was closed long ago,' said his niece; 'you can see if you look through the trap door.'

'I'll take your word for it my dear. Who did the bureau belong to, Walter? It looks a good piece of furniture,' said Rowancourt, examining rather curiously a substantial-looking bureau, with a bookcase and pigeon-holes forming its upper portion, which stood in a corner of the room.

'It belonged to George Chessington,' said his nephew. 'They tell me it would be difficult to find workmen who could make such a thing now. It is so beautifully finished.'

'Yes. But the desk's quite empty,' said Catherine. 'We've often looked. It used to be a great mystery to us as children.'

'It's good mahogany,' said her uncle, closing the lid

he had raised, and tapping the woodwork above with his cane. 'Hillo! what have we here!'

He had accidentally touched the spring of a secret drawer in the thicker part of the bookcase, which flew suddenly open.

'What a discovery, Uncle Giles!' cried Miss Chessington, running forward. 'Let us see what is inside. A bundle of letters! do look! Isn't that odd now,' and she handed a faded packet tied with a piece of red silk to her uncle.

'Bless my soul so it is,' answered he, examining them carefully. 'Ah! I see they are all addressed to George Chessington, and in a female hand too. No, here are two in a different style of writing—perhaps from Sir Pelham.'

'Oh do let us read them,' cried his niece.

'How like your sex, my dear,' said Rowancourt with a laugh.

'We'd better let you read them first, Uncle Giles,' said Walter. 'They are not very likely to be important. Probably they are old love letters, and you can tell us the story after you have studied them.'

'One would like to know who they are from at all events, said Catherine, peering over her uncle's shoulder. 'See, there is a signature! "*Estelle*—*Estelle ché*—," I can't make it out. It must be some French lady.'

'Feminine inquisitiveness, eh?' said Rowancourt, playfully taking them from her. 'I think perhaps I had better read them first.'

'Well do!' said Catherine. 'I must be going down to the village; so you and Walter can read them together and tell me all about them when I come back.'

‘ More old women, eh ? ’ said Uncle Giles ; ‘ she lives among ’em, upon my word.’

‘ I daresay you envy them, uncle. Why don’t you come too. *Au revoir !* ’

‘ A good girl Catherine,’ said Giles Rowancourt with a little sigh, as he watched her slight figure walking rapidly towards the house. ‘ A good girl ! and she’ll make a good wife some day for some lucky fellow, eh ? Well, let us get out of this musty old room. We’ll just have a look at the stables, and then I must peruse this precious packet,’ and they locked the door and went out again into the pleasant sunlight.

CHAPTER IX.

George Chessington's Correspondence.

The world's all title-page ; there's no contents ;
 The world's all face ; the man who shows his heart
 Is hooted for his nudities, and scorn'd.—YOUNG.

THESE letters are far more important than I had at first imagined, Walter,' said his uncle as they sat together that afternoon in the study. He had been reading them during the morning, and their perusal seemed to have made him rather grave.

'Look at that,' he said, handing him over a letter, which was written in a beautifully clear hand, was dated Otterstone, September, 1787, and was addressed to

*'Lieut. Chessington of the—th Regt. of Foot,
 At the house of Mr. Woodbridge, No. 21 Bedford Street,
 Covent Garden, London.'*

where George Chessington was apparently lodging. It began, 'Dearest George,' and after many expressions of affection, implored him to return as soon as he could to Otterstone. 'I pray you,' wrote the lady, 'do not forget that the period of my continuance in your father's house draws very near to its close. Your sister has no longer the need of my care as you well know, and what am I then to do, and whither must I go? George, you cannot picture to yourself how my terrors increase as the hour of my departure approaches! Dearest, I should

deceive you, should I say that I am resigned to fate ! This uncertainty is overwhelming. Return then quickly, I conjure you. Your father will pardon you now I am assured. It was but yesterday at the breakfast time that he complained of your absence.'

The letter which was written for the most part in somewhat stiff and laboured English, now and then interrupted by expressions in French, where the writer could not be sure of her meaning, or was carried away by strong feelings, then went on in the same urgent strain to state reasons for confessing everything to his father, or going away with the writer to France. It concluded with another urgent request to return, and was signed, 'Thy loving wife, Estelle.'

'It is clear that he was married,' said Walter.

'It looks like it, but whether it was a legal marriage is another question,' replied his uncle. 'However, you'll see that more clearly as you read the rest. The lady was evidently French governess to George Chessington's sister Isabel, who afterwards became Mrs. Beechcroft. Her maiden name seems to have been "Estelle Léon." Read on and you'll see.' And he stirred the fire vigorously and then carefully watched the face of his nephew.

The other letters, which were all later in date, showed that George Chessington had, after his wife left Otterstone, procured rooms for her in London, and that, when ordered on service to India, he had sent her over to Paris to a sister spoken of as her only living relation. The latest letter of the series was written from Paris just before her husband sailed, bidding him a heart-broken farewell. Here the record ceased. Of the remaining letters two were from Chessington's sister Isabel—one of which was addressed to himself, and the other to

Estelle Chessington—in both of which the latter was spoken of in most affectionate terms, while the third was from Sir Pelham to his son, in which the Baronet assured George of his full forgiveness for past differences, and of his warm affection, concluding with the hope that he would speedily return with honour to his country. This letter had evidently been written in answer to one from his son, from London, informing him of the approaching departure of his regiment to India.

‘What a strange secret to have discovered,’ said Walter, as he finished reading it. ‘What a sad story! If there had been a descendant of this marriage he would be the heir to Otterstone, and in my place. Heavens! Why should there not have been. Oh! if I could only discover!’ and he sprung to his feet and began excitedly pacing up and down.

‘Well, and if you could discover him,’ said his uncle with a keen look.

‘By heavens! I would surrender the property to-morrow,’ cried Walter, turning to the fire, and giving the big log that smouldered on it a kick that sent the sparks flying. It was lucky Walter’s back was turned, and that he could not see the sneer that passed over his uncle’s face, as he heard this sentiment.

‘Egad, would you!’ said that gentleman; ‘well upon my word the idea does you credit—infinite credit, upon my word! So like a young man too! Generosity is ever the fault that ruins us when we’re young.’

‘Generosity, uncle Giles?’ cried Walter, turning and staring at him. ‘It would only be justice.’

‘Justice, eh? H’m! well—perhaps, in a way. I see what you mean. But my dear boy, it must be clear to

you—plain as daylight, egad, that there's no possibility of such a thing, eh ?'

'Why ?' asked his nephew.

'In the first place, remember there's no marriage certificate, no proof of any legal union in short, and one knows that sham marriages were quite the thing in those days. A different age from ours, Walter; we've improved since then, eh ? And I should feel inclined to fear,' said Uncle Giles, wagging his head sorrowfully, 'that the young fellow deceived her, you know. You see there would have been the dickens to pay if it had not been a mock marriage.'

'Of course it may have been a mock marriage,' assented his nephew, 'but there is no proof either way.'

'Precisely, no proof. But there's a strong presumption. But granting it was real, do you suppose, my good fellow, that if any such claimant had existed, he wouldn't have looked after himself and pressed his claim long ago, eh ?

'Perhaps he might be ignorant, or have no means of doing so,' said Walter.

'Nonsense, my dear Walter ! people in that position don't want teaching, bless you ! Do you suppose his mother or her relations would have been silent ?'

'True,' murmured Walter, 'there's not much chance of that.'

'And then don't you see,' went on Uncle Giles, warming with his subject, 'that it's plain from Mrs. Beechcroft's letter, that she must have known something of this foolish connection, or had a shrewd suspicion of it ?'

'Yes, it certainly seems so.'

'And do you suppose, sir, that knowing that fact, these Beechcroft people, when they were trying to oust your poor father, begad, from his rights, wouldn't have played

that card then if they had it, eh? No, damme! I know 'em better! They'd have moved heaven and earth to do it, if they could!' Mr. Rowancourt crossed his legs, and leaning back in his chair gazed triumphantly through his eye-glass at his nephew, who was fain to acquiesce in the truth of his remarks.

'The whole thing is a mere affair of shadows so to speak,' said the uncle after a pause. 'But even if it were not, remember, for another thing, when this took place. Recollect that that deplorable Revolution, don't you know, played the dooce with things in France. You're better up in that sort of thing than I am, eh? But you know that those infernal scoundrels cut off everyone's head, and robbed and murdered right and left. And I should think it not at all improbable that this poor girl was guillotined, or something of that kind, in Paris—don't you see? Justice, I may say, is quite a weak point with me, and I should be very sorry to keep anyone out of what belonged to them. But its quite manifest, beyond a doubt, that there's no case of that kind here. No claimant has ever appeared, or is likely to appear, so my dear Walter there is nothing to be gained by discussing the matter.'

'Yes, no doubt, you are right,' said Walter, who had been listening not without an inward sense of amusement to his uncle's generous sentiments. 'As you say it is mere "fighting with shadows," it is impossible there should be any claimant, but it's very sad.'

'Ah, that's right,' said Uncle Giles, 'I am glad you agree with me. Of course it's sad—dooce'd sad,' and he continued to throw some semblance of sentiment into his light grey eyes, as he stared for a moment at the fire.

‘Yes, I think we may safely dismiss the subject from our minds,’ he resumed after a pause, ‘and now to turn to another one. I must tell you, Walter, that I am the bearer of an important proposition to you.’ And he then told his nephew of his plan for contesting the borough of Lidfield.

His proposition took Walter so much by surprise that he was for a moment inclined to meet it with a direct negative. ‘He was quite unfitted, he was sure, for such a position. He was untried, and perhaps—was he not too young?’ By degrees, however, the adroit flattery of his uncle and his plausible arguments, agreeing as they did with his secret aspirations, began to tell on him. His mother and sister made so much of him, and took it so much to heart whenever he stayed long away from them, that he felt a little qualm when he thought what an effect his acceptance of his uncle’s offer would have on them. But after all, he said to himself as he dressed for dinner, surely it would be a good thing for him to feel that he was doing something useful—that he was helping to guide the destinies of his country!

Uncle Giles renewed his attack after dinner, when Catherine and her mother had retired to the drawing room, and Walter began to feel that, if he had gifts which, even to a small extent fitted him for parliamentary life, it would be in a way shirking a duty not to try and turn them to account. He had very fair abilities, and, unknown to himself, a good deal of ambition, which had hitherto found sufficient satisfaction in acquiring popularity with his friends and neighbours. He had, moreover, read and thought more than most men of his age on political questions, and was fond of imparting his views to others. It was therefore not alto-

gether surprising that under Rowancourt's adroit encouragement he should find himself stating his opinions on various subjects very fully to his uncle. When the latter made a final attempt to gain his point, over a cigar in the smoking room, Walter virtually yielded to the temptations of the prospect, and his shrewd canvasser felt that the battle was won.

'You ought to keep these letters, Walter, eh?' said he as they were going to bed, 'but I should just like to make a note about them before I return them.'

'Certainly, Uncle Giles,' said his nephew; and he wished him good night with a feeling, that though his uncle, perhaps, was a little hard and unscrupulous, he certainly was very shrewd, had a great deal of discernment, and was, moreover, a very agreeable man.

'I wonder if he's to be trusted with these letters, poor boy,' thought the uncle as he carried them to his room. 'Perhaps it would be safer to forget them for a little; but I think he sees the folly of his sentimentality. Of course he's outgrown most of it as I expected; but he's got a good deal of it still, egad. Full of ingenious ideas apparently, but that 'll make him all the more manageable, and people like to see a fellow of that age fresh and enthusiastic. I think he'll do with care. He has a great idea of making himself agreeable; but I must take him in hand a bit, and get rid of some of this ingenuousness. They ought to get more people here, too, for Catherine's sake. Poor Adela's getting quite callous as to her duties in that way. When I come into the title'——and full of such schemes he sought the repose which should reward a well-spent day. Once in the night he awoke and found himself wondering whether George Chessington had left a son. 'Utterly impossible,' he said to him-

self. 'These Beechcroft people would have made capital out of it. What a fool I am!' and he went to sleep again.

CHAPTEX X.

No. 9 Poulford Street.

‘Mr. Spectator, . . . I am, sir, a bachelor of some standing, and a traveller; my business, to consult my own humour, which I gratify without controlling other people’s; I have a room and a whole bed to myself; and I have a dog, a fiddle, and a gun; they please me, and injure no creature alive. My chief meal is a supper, which I always make at a tavern.’

THE SPECTATOR.



NO. 9 Poulford Street, where Wilfrid Oakburne had installed himself on his arrival in London, was a roomy, three-storied house, at the corner of Poulford Square, a tidy looking block of buildings, standing on the slope of a steep incline, not far from the Gray’s Inn Road, down which he had to walk daily when he went to St. Christopher’s Hospital. From its proximity to the hospital, Poulford Street is much affected by medical students, while its situation on, what may for London be considered, high ground, close to two great Railway termini, and the line of ‘busses,’ makes it a convenient situation for city men, and hence No. 9, like the other houses in the street, was seldom empty for long.

These facts were imparted to Wilfrid when he first took the lodgings, by Mrs. Hollis, the landlady, a short stout woman with a red face, and a pair of broad shoulders that excited the wonder of all who beheld her for the first time. She also told him, as she was wont to inform all her lodgers, that she was a widow, with one

little girl, (whom she called Battie); that there were 'four other gentlemen' in the house, besides himself; and that she 'generally gave satisfaction to her gentlemen,'—all which facts, the last, strange to say, included, Wilfrid found to be strictly true. His rooms were clean and comfortable, his comforts well looked after, and his fellow lodgers pleasant and sociable, and he soon found himself far more contented and happy than he could ever have imagined when he left Lidfield.

One of Mrs. Hollis's 'gentlemen,' as she called them, was a young fellow of the name of Norton, a 'Kitt's' man—the students of 'St. Christopher's Hospital' always alluded to it as 'Kitts'—and with him Oakburne naturally soon became intimate. The pair shared their sitting-room in common, and studied and attended lectures together, and though Norton,—an incorrigible wag, sometimes wearied him by his incessant chaffing, singing, and talking, Wilfrid found him a very good fellow, and decidedly superior to most of his fellow students, a large proportion of whom delighted in wrenching off bells and knockers, in making noisy demonstrations in public places, in wine parties and music halls, and other such boisterous amusements which were not at all to his taste.

The opposite sitting-room was occupied by another couple of friends, both of whom were the seniors by a good deal, of the two young embryo doctors. Of these, one was a hard-working literary man, of some three or four-and-thirty, Beverley Chipps by name, who supported himself by contributions to various papers and periodicals. Being of a sociable and jovial disposition, he often invited Oakburne and Norton to come and smoke their cigars with him, and being an admirable mimic and a

good musician, he used to make the evenings thus spent with him, pass very pleasantly, and was on very good terms with both of them. For some time, however, these little meetings were only held when Beverley Chipps's friend, Mr. Throckmorton, who usually dined at his club, and came home late, was away, and it was not till he had been an inmate of the lodgings some time, that Wilfrid made the latter's acquaintance.

Mr. Throckmorton, who has already been mentioned as the great friend of General Beechcroft, and who bequeathed to the present writer the MS. and notes from which he has extracted the history now laid before the reader,—a history in which Edward Throckmorton himself bore a not inconsiderable part—was a gentleman held in some awe, not only by Mrs. Hollis the landlady, who had the greatest reverence for him, but by his fellow lodgers. The former described him to Wilfrid as 'a lawyer sir,—a very rich gentleman, connected with the aristocracy as I'm told—rather curious in his ways, but quite the gentleman ;' a description which Oakburne's conversations with Beverley Chipps and Norton on the subject shewed to be correct, as far as it went. Mr. Throckmorton *was* a conveyancer and a member of Lincoln's Inn, where he had chambers in Old Square. He *was* very well off, and of a very good old family, and it was true that if his kinsman, Sir Carnaby Rudstone, the rich Yorkshire Baronet, died unmarried, he would inherit his extensive property. No doubt, also, it *was* curious, in a manner, that a man with such ample means should choose to live in Poulford Street, instead of in the Albany, or even in Lincoln's Inn, solely for the sake of the situation ; and still more strange that he should rise all the year round at half-past six, and betake himself

with unfailing regularity to his work, as if his bread depended on it. Such was the case, however. Precisely as the clock struck a quarter to seven, the sounds of falling water, followed by the splashing and floundering of some heavy body, informed the inhabitants of No. 9 that Mr. Throckmorton was taking his shower bath ; and equally surely did the snatch of some old song, sung in a mellow bass voice, proclaim to them that the tubbing ceremonial was at an end. By seven they knew he was working in his room till eight o'clock, when he would himself cook his breakfast, and, having eaten it, would start exactly at nine to walk to Lincoln's Inn, reaching his chambers in Old Square punctually at ten. As he had been an inmate of the house for nearly seven years,—‘seven years come Michelmas, Mr. Oakburne, just before my poor husband died, he came first, and was most kind to me at that sad time,’ said Mrs. Hollis,—and had never been known to fail in this daily routine, it was natural that he should be looked on as somewhat different from his fellow men, and that his singularity, combined with his wealth, his kindness, and a certain stern decision of manner, should lead his younger acquaintance to regard him with respectful curiosity. That he wrote books, and articles for the papers, and had a considerable share in the ‘Weekly Censor, a Political and Literary Review,’ of the staff of which Beverley Chipps was a leading member ; that he belonged to the ‘Athenæum,’ and other clubs ; that he went away every 12th August, and every 30th December, returning regularly every 29th October, and 31st January ; that he had travelled everywhere, was near fifty, wore double eye-glasses, played the violin, and was very charitable ; all these were facts concerning Mr. Throck-

morton, that Norton and Beverley Chipps imparted to Wilfrid as matters which he must feel that it behoved him to know. The manner in which they were thus told to him, naturally piqued his curiosity concerning the man, and made him feel that he somehow occupied an inferior position in the little society of No. 9, as long as he remained unacquainted with him. In spite of this feeling, however, they still continued strangers to each other for some two months after his arrival.

It happened that one morning towards the end of June, Wilfrid, coming down early to do some reading, and requiring to make some notes, found his ink bottle empty. As he was pressed for time, and as the notes, though important, could be made in five minutes, he thought he might save himself trouble by asking for the loan of Beverley Chipps' ink-stand. It was, however, nearly eight o'clock ; Mr. Throckmorton would be in the room, but Beverley, who was a late riser, would not. He hesitated a moment, and then decided that it would be better to ask him than to lose time by going out to buy the necessary fluid. Mr. Throckmorton's door, to his surprise, was half open. He tapped and received no answer, and looking in, saw the room was empty. He was in a hurry, and therefore determined to take French leave, and apologise afterwards to the owner of the room. There was the ink-stand on the middle of the table, which was half covered by a cloth on which were the necessary preparations for Mr. Throckmorton's breakfast, while at the other end a pile of manuscript, the upper sheet of which was still wet with ink, lay on the open blotting book. Wilfrid, seizing a pen, bent over the table and had soon scribbled off the important notes. He replaced the pen, and turned to depart, congratulating himself on

having managed so neatly, when his foot caught in the table-cloth, and giving it a sudden jerk, discharged the contents of the ink bottle half over the newly-finished manuscript, and half over the loaf which was to form an important part of Throckmorton's breakfast. As he was gazing in despair at the mischief he had wrought, a deep voice made him suddenly start in dismay. 'Upon my word, young sir,' said the voice, 'your conduct is outrageous!' and looking up, he beheld opposite to him a portly gentleman of middle height, with curly, grizzled brown hair, whose face, clean shaven save for a pair of small grey whiskers, bore unmistakeable signs of anger. A heavy frown clouded his broad square forehead, his piercing grey eyes glared savagely at the luckless Wilfrid from under his bushy eyebrows, and there was an unpleasant look about his firmly-set lips that made the young fellow stammer very awkwardly over the excuses he tried to offer in his extenuation.

'An accident! yes sir! that I can well conceive. Few men would dare to come and spill the contents of a man's ink-bottle over his own table as you have done, on purpose. But let me tell you, sir, that your presence here was quite unwarrantable. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, and your conduct in, without leave granted, making use of my ink-bottle, can in no way be justified.'

Wilfrid fired up at this. 'Upon my word, you have no right to say that!' cried he. 'I have known Mr. Beverley Chipps some time, and being in a hurry and having found myself short of ink, I ventured to make use of his ink-bottle for a—a few minutes. The accident I am very sorry for, but it might have happened to

anybody ; and let me tell you, Mr. Throckmorton, that I—that I consider your remarks are——’

He suddenly stopped short in his indignation, for Mr. Throckmorton here interrupted him by breaking into a hearty laugh. ‘Come, come, my dear young sir!’ cried he, ‘I was only joking. I came in unobserved while you were making your notes, and heard you congratulate yourself on having avoided me. The temptation to denounce you while you were so horribly confused with the consequences of your accident was irresistible, and besides, let me tell you that you have half ruined my manuscript. It ought to have gone to press this morning, and as I shall be busy all day it will now have to stand over till next week when probably it will be out of date. Look here!’ and he held up one of the blurred and stained pages with a rueful smile.

‘Will you allow me to copy it as some amends for my stupidity?’ cried Wilfrid, relieved at the unexpected turn things had taken.

‘Eh? Will you really? Upon my word that’s very good of you!’ cried Mr. Throckmorton eagerly, laying a hand on his shoulder. ‘You would really do me a great service, because I particularly want the article out this week. Are you sure you don’t mind, eh?’

‘Not in the least,’ replied Wilfrid, ‘I shall be very glad. I have to attend a lecture, but I shall be back by eleven if that will suit you.’

‘That will do capitally! you have taken a great weight off my mind!’ and then Mr. Throckmorton, examining the amount of damage done, showed Wilfrid what required rewriting, and gave him an envelope directed to Messrs. Dint, Blatters & Son, the printers of his paper, to whom he requested him to send the MS. by post.

‘And now you had better have some breakfast with me,’ he said, and after watching the process of chop frying, to which Mr. Throckmorton devoted himself with much earnestness, Oakburne at length found himself discussing that meal with the man whom he had been so long anxious to meet.

‘So you’re name’s Oakburne, is it? I once had a very dear friend of that name, Edward Oakburne. We were at college together, but he died early, poor fellow! Poor fellow! he was a very gifted man, a very worthy man! Help yourself to some more bread. That’s right! What part of the world do you come from?’

Wilfrid replied that he lived in Hillshire. ‘My grandfather settled there as a young man,’ said he, ‘but I believe my people lived in Clayshire before that. They were there for many generations.’

‘Hillshire? That’s odd! you don’t live at Lidfield, do you?’ and Mr. Throckmorton laid down his knife and fork, and gazed keenly at Wilfrid, who replied with a laugh that he did, and that he had been born there and his father before him.

‘And your grandfather was the partner of Elkfield, the wool manufacturer there?’

‘Yes of course he was,’ says the other.

‘Then my dear boy, your uncle Edward Oakburne was my very great friend. You had an uncle Edward surely? And you must have heard of me—of Edward Throckmorton?’

‘I had an uncle Edward, but he died almost before I was born I think,’ replied Wilfrid, ‘and I have heard of your name—where I can’t exactly remember, but not from anyone at home. All my uncles and aunts died early, and we have no living relations now.’

‘Ah! I daresay it’s natural that you should never have heard. Why should you, indeed?’ and Mr. Throckmorton rose and paced the room as though moved by some sudden recollection. ‘Why should the present generation care for, or even remember the things that are so precious to those that have gone before them? Dear me! How long ago it seems now. Yes, young man, your Uncle Edward was my great friend and crony at college, and for some two years after. Then a difference arose between us, which estranged us’—he paused in some emotion—‘which estranged us altogether. We discontinued our intercourse to the great sorrow of both—and then, he died before we were ever able to effect a reconciliation. We never met again as friends.’

Wilfrid had listened, as may be supposed, with great interest to those reminiscences of his dead relative. He was about to make some remark in reply, when the baker’s cart rattled up to the door, and Mrs. Hollis’s little girl was heard rushing up the area steps to receive him. His ring at the bell was a landmark in the day to Throckmorton, and recalled him to himself.

‘I must be off,’ he cried. ‘I am late; I fear I shall have to take a cab—a very rare occurrence with me, I can assure you! I am glad to have come across you, my boy, for your uncle’s sake. You have a look of the Oakburnes about you! Don’t forget the papers, and please stamp the envelope, and I will repay you the postage,’ and two minutes after Wilfrid heard him bang the house-door and hail a passing hansom.

As Oakburne was copying out the article which had been the indirect cause of his introduction to his uncle’s old friend, he suddenly remembered that he had heard the name of ‘Throckmorton for the first time at Otter-

stone, when he visited it with his brother, as described in a previous chapter. He mentioned the circumstance to his new friend when they met that evening, and learnt that this made a fresh bond of interest between them. Mr. Throckmorton knew all about Otterstone Hall of course, and all about the Oakburne's ownership of the property in old times. He knew, moreover, all about James Chessington's will, and the consequences of that instrument. He had always regarded the latter's conduct as most cruel and unjust, and had left no stone unturned which was likely to help his friend General Beechcroft to recover the estates of which he had been so unexpectedly deprived. It was with the greatest regret and vexation that he was obliged to abandon the cause as hopeless, and bid his old school-fellow resign himself to his loss. In addition to the interest he still continued to feel in all that related to the place, he had certain other motives for disliking Giles Rowancourt, and hence he was apt to look on the whole race of Chessingtons as dangerous impostors.

All these facts Oakburne gathered during his conversation with Mr. Throckmorton over an excellent cigar which that gentleman invited him to smoke, thanking him for the copy he had made for him, a proof of which he had seen at Messrs. Dint, Blatter, and Sons. Norton was included in the invitation, and he and Beverley Chipps helped to enliven an evening which passed very pleasantly, and it was past eleven o'clock when Mr. Throckmorton, who was seldom later in going to bed, gave the signal for dispersing.

Late as it was, however, Herr Karl was only just coming in as they sought their respective bedrooms. Herr Karl was that fifth lodger of Mrs. Hollis's who was

mentioned at the beginning of this chapter—a gigantic Saxon, whose red bearded face always wore a half-starved, anxious look, and who gained his living as a teacher of his native German. “Which I don’t think he makes much by it, sir!” said Mrs. Hollis; “not enough to feed himself properly. And he’s always away by eight in the morning, too, and doesn’t get back till ever so late. He’s very poor, and I’m sure he’s in very bad health, sir. But he always pays his rent regular, poor gentleman, and is most quiet and civil!”

Poor Herr Karl had no sitting-room, but had to smoke his solitary pipe in his little bedroom at the top of the house. Whatever his circumstances were—and the landlady was fully convinced he had known better days—he continued unknown to his fellow lodgers, carefully avoiding them, and speaking to no one but Mrs. Hollis and her little girl. Little Battie—‘Battie’ was her mother’s abbreviation for Beatrice—was a general favourite in the house as a clean, nice-looking, useful child, and was Herr Karl’s chief friend. Wilfred used to hear the German talking to her in his broken English, when she brought up his breakfast to him in the morning. ‘Kom hither, Meess Battie,’ he would say, ‘and tell me how ze day goes to-day,’ and the little maiden would then report on the state of the weather, and carry on a short dialogue till his hurried meal was over. Then Herr Karl would remark that ‘Ze hour waits for nobodies; it is time to be gone, Battie, hey?’ and presently his heavy tramp would be heard descending the stairs. Thus though they had a good-natured pity for him, the other gentlemen who inhabited No. 9 Poulford Street had but little occasion to trouble themselves about the doings of this hardworked and ill-fed foreigner,

CHAPTER XI.

Recognitions.

I said there was not half a guinea's worth of pleasure in seeing this place. *Johnson*: 'But, sir, there is half a guinea's worth of inferiority to other people in not having seen it.' *Boswell*: 'I doubt, sir, whether there are many happy people here.' *Johnson*: 'Yes, sir, there are many happy people here. There are many people here who are watching hundreds, and who think hundreds are watching them.'—BOSWELL'S JOHNSON.

So memory stirred in each ;
 As on a tideless beach
 The moaning wind will ape the loud sea wave.
 Then, in a moment's space,
 Faded from either face
 The shade of shades which dim remembrance gave ;
 She was a queen, erect, and fair, and cold,
 And he a singer, to be fee'd with gold.—GOSSE.



R. THROCKMORTON was fond of telling Wilfrid, in his somewhat sententious way, that 'no one has a right to deliberately sit down and gloat or mourn over past reminiscences or future prospects till he's too old to work, and may be excused from trying to live in the present. Day dreaming in the young is a vice that should be sternly checked, and you are too fond of day-dreaming my lad ! A fellow of your age ought to have nothing but the present, and has no business to be remembering or castle-building. Don't tell me, sir ! I have watched you, and know it's the case.'

It may be supposed that the intimacy between the pair had grown to be pretty close, which enabled Mr. Throckmorton thus to admonish Oakburne, and it was chiefly on account of the friendship thus formed, that Wilfrid Oakburne, with all due respect for the above precept, used in after days to recall the first half year of his sojourn in Poulford Street as one of the happiest periods of his life. The inhabitants of No. 9 formed, as has been said, a peculiarly harmonious and cheery circle. Wilfrid could not well have found a more suitable chum for one of his somewhat despondent temperament than Norton, and when he was inclined to be lazy, Mr. Throckmorton, who was ever instilling into him the beauties of the maxim *laborare est orare*, kept him steadily to the task he had undertaken by constant admonitions full of caustic humour and sound sense.

This friendly mentor, however, did not confine himself to showing his interest in him solely by preaching him sermons. He manifested an evident pleasure in having him with him ; making him visit him in his chambers at Lincoln's Inn, having him to dine with him at his club, and introducing him to some of his friends, from whom Wilfrid learnt that Mr. Throckmorton was held in high estimation by all who knew him as a clever, benevolent, though somewhat eccentric man. He also directed Wilfrid's reading, and judiciously encouraged a talent for composition, which he discovered him to possess, so that the young fellow had the delight of seeing one of his articles in the *Polyolbion*, a magazine with the editor of which Mr. Throckmorton had an acquaintance. It will be seen therefore that Oakburne had decidedly fallen on his feet in the matter of friends, and with friends in London who can be dull?

The season of 1853 was more than usually brilliant, and the martial pride of the nation was gratified by the spectacles of the Naval Review at Spithead, and the great camp at Cobham. The spirit of war was in truth in the air, for the struggle between Turkey and Russia was impending, though those who, full of the memory of the Great Duke, crowded to Apsley House which his son and successor had generously for a time thrown open to the public, little knew how soon their own country was to be drawn into the conflict, or how they would miss the skill and counsels of the greatest of English generals. Besides sight-seeing, theatres, and the like, Oakburne got more healthy amusements. He and his friend Norton often managed in the summer to get down to Putney or Twickenham for a pull on the river, while Wilfrid, who was a very fair cricketer, got plenty of his favourite game by joining the Hospital club. So summer succeeded spring and in turn gave place to autumn, till the days began to grow short and chilly, and Wilfrid Oakburne, engrossed with his work and his recreation, often forgot all about Lidfield and its associations. Now and then letters would come from home full of affectionate satisfaction at the good accounts he wrote of himself, and giving him in return a budget of local gossip, while still more rarely brief epistles from India showed that his brother Reginald had not altogether forgotten him. On one occasion Ethel wrote that when calling at the Rectory she had been introduced to Giles Rowancourt, and his nephew Walter Chessington, who had been for some time staying at Lady Thistledale's. 'Both Mr. Elkfield and old Mr. Portal,' said the writer, 'told the Rector in *strict confidence* that Mr. Chessington, who seems very nice, is coming forward to stand for the Boro' when poor

Sir Joseph Boarsby dies, and he's been so dreadfully ill that they say he can't last through the year, though he rallied so wonderfully before. I am sure this is the case, for the girls at the Rectory, whose mother tells them everything, told me. Mr. Chessington and his uncle have dined two or three times with the Elkfields. What a catch he would be for your flame Beatrice!' Wilfrid laughed at his sister's idea of 'strict confidence,' and set down her remark about Miss Elkfield to feminine jealousy. He did not care very much who represented Lidfield, and his work just at this time being rather heavy, he soon forgot all about the matter.

As the autumn drew to a close he noticed however a marked change in these letters from Lidfield. They not only grew very rare indeed, but were also so extremely cold and short, that it seemed as if the writers were offended with him. His mother seemed to have given up writing to him altogether, and his sister to write always as if it were an unwelcome duty. He would have been inclined to be angry had he not been forced to own to himself that he had been very remiss in answering them; but his shortcomings in this respect, and the near approach of Christmas, when he was to go to Lidfield for a time, made him content to show his displeasure by a continued silence.

One evening early in December, as he was sitting over a text-book of physiology, his studies were suddenly rudely interrupted by the entrance of Norton, whose spirits had been raised by a remittance from home, and who therefore proposed that they should go to the Momus Theatre,' and hear a certain new burlesque which had met with a very favourable reception from the public. They had not been for ages—(indeed it was

nearly a fortnight, as Oakburne sarcastically remarked)—and he was evidently depressed and wanted cheering. ‘I always think a good laugh benefits the whole system,’ says his friend, whose normal condition during the best part of the day was laughter, ‘you’re hipped and require it my boy! Come. We’ll dine at the Café Frankfurt which they say is wonderfully good. Come now. No humbug—I’ll stand the dinner.’

Wilfrid, who did not feel very much inclined to go, for some little time attempted to adjourn the expedition to a future day. Norton, however, having once made up his mind on the subject was not thus to be put off. He commenced giving a series of imitations of the principal actors in the piece, and singing snatches from the most popular songs, till the study of physiology became impossible. Then, having successfully diverted his friend’s attention from his work, he renewed his entreaties until Wilfrid yielded in despair, and Norton led him in triumph to the restaurant at which they proposed dining.

The Café Frankfurt in Leicester Square, the proprietor of which was a certain Mons. Reuben Ledru, said to be a Belgian, was in those days rather popular, especially with foreigners, and as Wilfrid and Norton entered most of the little tables were occupied.

‘They say that Madam Ledru is a great beauty,’ said Norton. ‘There she is. By Jove! Isn’t she a stunner! That big fat man with the black beard who is just going out, and getting into the cab, is her husband, the proprietor. I believe he drinks, and beats her.’

‘She certainly is very handsome,’ said Wilfrid, as they took their places at a table close to the bar, glancing

with admiration at Madam, whose dark bright eyes and clear pale complexion were indeed very striking.

‘I wonder what is up?’ said Norton, fixing his eyeglass and staring about him as his wont was.

‘What is up, sir?’ asked he of a man sitting at the table near him, ‘there seems to be an uncommon row about something.’ There was a great buzz of talk on some subject which seemed to connect all the tables, and newspapers were being handed from one to the other.

‘Have’nt you heard?’ was the reply, ‘Russia has declared war against Turkey, or rather accepted the Turkish declaration, and the British fleet has entered the Bosphorus.’

‘What, really! Bravo!’ cries Norton, ‘I drink confusion to the Czar! Oakburne, why don’t you drink confusion to Nicholas?’

‘What a politician you are!’ said Oakburne, laughing.

‘I take great interest in this most important question,’ said his friend pompously. ‘England must not stand aloof at this crisis. The British Lion must be up and doing. Is not that your opinion, sir?’ he asked of his informant, and then the two fell to denouncing Pease, Cobden, and Bright, and extolling Lord Palmerston. The feeling against Russia which had been growing steadily during the year was now beginning to assume a very decided form, and the news that hostilities had actually begun created a good deal of excitement and made the frequenters of the Café Frankfurt unusually talkative that evening.

Madam Ledru sat calm and unmoved amidst the bable of sounds and the bustle of hurrying waiters and coming and departing guests. Wilfrid, who felt oddly attracted

by her, could not help watching her, and found himself wondering how such a refined looking woman had accepted such a position and married such a coarse looking fellow as the man Norton had pointed out as her husband. He noticed that her handsome eyes seemed always to be fixed on the entrance which opened into Princes Street, till suddenly he saw them light up as a big, red-bearded man, with a pale thin face, strode into the room.

‘I say,’ said he, nudging Norton, ‘Isn’t that Herr Karl?’

‘So it is!’ replied the other, getting him under the range of his eyeglass, ‘so it is! How ill he looks, poor beggar! I daresay he always comes here to dine. This is a great place for foreigners.’

‘He does look ill!’ said Wilfrid. ‘He seems to know Madam Ledru pretty well though, doesn’t he?’

‘Lucky beggar!’ cried Norton.

Herr Karl had gone up to the bar and greeted Madam Ledru warmly, who, descending from the raised seat she occupied, extended to him both hands, and the pair began talking earnestly together.

‘Ah ha!’ said Norton, looking very roguish, ‘we saw Monsieur Ledru drive off as we arrived. I’m shocked at Herr Karl; this shows him in a new light. See, he’s going to feed now. Poor fellow! I’m sure he looks as if he wanted it. I never saw a man who had starvation more plainly written in his face.’

‘He seems to be miserably poor. One can see it from his dress,’ said Wilfrid, as they saw their fellow-lodger sit down to a steaming plate of *bouillon*. ‘I say Norton, we ought to be moving, if we are to be in time,’ and they paid their bill, and set out for the theatre.’

The frequency of their visits to such places of entertainment made them often content to take seats in the pit, and on this occasion they managed to secure some in the front row, which, the stalls at the 'Momus' in those days being few in number, was very close to the stage.

'It's not much of a house,' said Norton. 'A good many of the boxes seem empty; but it's early of course as yet. I wonder who those fellows are?' he added, as a party of four well dressed men entered a box not far from them on the lower tier.

'I'm sure I don't know,' replied Wilfrid. 'Stay though! I'm sure I've seen that bald, red whiskered man before! Yes! Of course! His name's Rowan-court—Giles Rowancourt. He is Lord Ashleigh's son. I saw him at a ball down at home, but I know nothing about him,' and he recalled the incidents of that eventful dance at the Elkfields. The face of one of the younger men seemed also not unfamiliar to him, and as he was trying to remember who he could be, a man and woman, with the usual apologies for treading on their toes, passed by them and took two seats which had been somehow left vacant next to him. They had hardly got into their places, when Norton whispered to his friend, 'Herr Karl, again, by Jove! and with Madam!'

Wilfrid who had not looked at them turned in surprise, and Herr Karl, seeing himself recognised, gave him the nod, and the 'how you do mister,' which he was accustomed to do when they met on the stairs of their lodgings. Having thus satisfied the demands of politeness, he fell to talking in German with his companion, whose striking beauty seemed to attract much

attention. Norton, looking unutterable things at the pair, had just begun to whisper 'that he was deeply grieved with Herr Karl, and should write to Monsieur le propriétaire,' when the curtain rose and diverted his attention.

The preliminary farce did not much divert Oakburne, and he was dreamily wondering why the 'first walking gentleman'—now-a-days, of course 'nous avons changé tout cela'—should go to a dinner party in a black frock coat and white woollen gloves, when Herr Karl touched him gently on the shoulder.

'Pardon, Herr mister! Can you tell me pray who shall be that young man in that box over there? Hey?' and he pointed to that box in which Wilfrid had seen Giles Rowancourt and his friends.

'Which young man,' said the latter, rather surprised, 'there are two.'

'The yellow-coloured haired young man, the blonde you understand,' said Herr Karl.

'Well its odd! I feel sure I have seen him somewhere, but at this moment I can't remember. The bald, red-whiskered man is . . .'

'No, no! Not him. I mean the young man. The two others, besides the red-whiskered, shall have both black hair, and one shall be not very young. I mean the blonde. You cannot tell me? No?'

'Upon my word,' says Wilfrid, anxious for his own satisfaction to recall the name, 'It's very odd. I have it on the tip of my tongue—but . . .'

'It is not Gessington? hey? no?'

'Eh? say it again. Its very like that.'

'Shessington. Ha! yes! I think yes!'

'Chessington! the very name,' cried Wilfrid. 'That's

it of course, Walter Chessington! He is a young man of property.'

The man whom they were talking of seemed suddenly conscious of their observation, and levelled his glasses at them.'

'Odderstone 'All is it not? yes?' enquired the German.

'Yes, you are quite right,' replied Wilfrid, smiling at the odd pronunciation, 'yes, I am glad you asked me, for I wanted myself to remember who he was. You have seen him then before? You know him?'

'Oh! I do not know him *well* you understand. We shall have met abroad; in Deutchland. Yes. That is all. I know him slightly—only that. Yes. I thank you sir,' and with a bow he turned and resumed his conversation with Madam Ledru, who also seemed to recognise Walter Chessington. After having satisfied themselves as to his identity, they ceased staring at him, but Oakburne could see that they were still talking about him. The object of their scrutiny seemed to be in high spirits, talking and laughing with his companions, with whom he was evidently popular. When the farce was over, Wilfrid saw him leave his box and reappear in one on the opposite side of the house, where he was welcomed by the party occupying it. Norton, who complained of the heat, insisted at this point on his going out with him to get a 'brandy and soda,' and when they returned the burlesque had begun.

It was one of the first of that class of productions which have now superseded the elaborate burlesque fairy stories of Planché, and which, despising all plot, depend on abundance of puns, absurd 'business,' and comic songs. Its novelty made it very acceptable to the

audience who loudly applauded it. Wilfrid at first joined heartily in the laughter and clapping, and in the vociferous encores. In that scene, however, in which the Princess—the scene of the story is laid somewhere in eastern realms, and the events took place sometime in ‘the golden prime of good Haroun Alraschid,’—together with her retinue passes down the street, and the youthful hero becomes enamoured of her charms, Oakburne started so violently and gave vent to such an exclamation of surprise as rather startled Norton, and made him turn and stare at him.

‘What’s up?’ said his friend, ‘Are you seedy? you look rather pale.’ Wilfrid was gazing fixedly at the procession of brilliantly dressed ballet girls who formed the suite of the Princess.

‘It is nothing,’ he said, still keeping his eyes rivetted on the bright array of warriors and courtiers who were marching two and two to a popular air round the stage by way of conducting their royal mistress to her far off home.

‘Nothing man! I say I hope you don’t feel bad?’

‘Yes . . . Yes it is,’ murmured Wilfrid.

‘What?’ asked the astonished Norton.

‘I—I think I know that girl, that one in pink and blue, with the gold helmet and black and gold stockings.’

The warrior thus dazzlingly attired seemed also to recognize Oakburne, for she turned and stared so intently at him that she allowed her scimitar to slip from her hand and nearly tripped up in her efforts to recover it, thus slightly spoiling the beauty of the cavalcade’s exit.

‘By Jove!’ cried Norton, with a laugh, ‘I believe she recognised you! what a lark! I say we’ll go round to the stage door and ask her to supper, eh?’

‘Hush!’ said Wilfrid, angrily. ‘Don’t be a fool, and please speak more quietly, Norton. I shant do any such thing.’

‘Why not? Ah, I see. Ha, ha, ha! Sly dog!’ said Norton, fixing his eyeglass and poking Wilfrid in the ribs. ‘I shouldn’t have thought it of you, Oakburne. Ha, ha! sly dog! sly dog!’

‘Do be quiet, you duffer!’ said Wilfrid, feeling rather uncomfortable as he saw one or two of the people near laughing at him, and detected a smile on the face of Herr Karl.

‘Certainly, sir! certainly!’ says the irrepressible Norton. ‘I understand your feelings, sir. Let us attend to the drama. Improving! very improving, sir. Let us gather those moral lessons which that great educator the stage teaches. *Most* improving! *most* improving!’ and he assumed a preternaturally solemn look, and stared earnestly at the proceedings of the hero’s wicked uncle, who was just then compassing his nephew’s destruction by means of some of the most highly comic business in the whole play.

Oakburne bore his friend’s chaff as best he could, and watched with anxiety for the return of the Princess’s suite. Those gorgeous beings, however, did not reappear till the third and last act, by which time he had recovered his composure; and, having borrowed a pair of glasses from an obliging man on the other side of Norton, he examined them steadily as they came tripping on to the stage to slaughter the wicked magician and his followers. Yes! there was no mistaking her. The warrior in blue and pink was Lois Simcox. How handsome she looked in that silly dress. She knew him, too, for she gave a little nod of recognition when the phalanx

drew up, and marked time in front of the audience—a nod that no one else could have told meant anything, but which he perfectly understood. What was she doing there? He could think of no satisfactory reason; and her presence in such circumstances made him feel anxious and distressed. Should he really try and speak to her afterwards? But no; with Norton there it would never do. He must wait. He wistfully watched her retreating figure as the corps of fair soldiers, having vanquished their enemies, retired to the background, and the principal personages in the extravaganza came forward to sing the concluding chorus. He felt relieved when the curtain fell, and Norton, giving him a slap on the back, bade him ‘come along.’

‘There goes Herr Karl and his friend,’ said the latter, pointing out the pair. ‘I say, shall we go to the stage door?’

‘No, no! not now,’ said Wilfrid, ‘let us get home.’

Norton was somewhat disappointed. The idea of a supper with one of the corps-de-ballet had delighted him. Being, however, the essence of good nature, and seeing that his friend was not in a humour for such pleasures, he forbore to press him, and they slowly made their way out.

There was a great crowd now, for many had looked in to see the burlesque only, and increased the originally small audience. Oakburne and his companion somehow got hustled into the principal entrance of the theatre, from which the occupants of the stalls and boxes were gradually taking their departure as their respective chariots appeared.

‘See!’ said Wilfrid suddenly, ‘Herr Karl has got hold of his acquaintance.’

The block was so thick that they had got wedged into the lobby—the Momus Theatre, though tastefully decorated and very complete in its way, was then but a little box of a place—and were unable to move. In a recess close to them, Herr Karl, who had apparently parted from Madam Ledru, was speaking to Walter Chessington, whom Oakburne now clearly recognised. They were so close to the pair that they could not help over hearing some of their conversation.

‘I do not feel sure that I remember you, my friend,’ Walter was saying. ‘What name did you give me.’

‘Hoffbauer! Theodore Hoffbauer. Do you not remember Frankfort, Herr Mister, and 1848? That leetle house in the Krone Platz, and that old Professor? Surely you shall recollect them? Yes? See, here is your handwriting. Is it not so?’ and Herr Karl looked at him eagerly as he handed to him a dingy piece of paper.

‘Frankfort? of course. Yes, I remember you now,’ cried Chessington, as he glanced at the paper. ‘Good heavens! you have changed, my poor fellow, during these five years. I recollect you perfectly now. Can’t we get out of this infernal crowd somehow, though?’ He looked round, but his hansom had not yet come up.

‘You told her to whom you shall have given this writing,’ went on Herr Karl, ‘you shall have *bromissed* her that if she should require it she might, or I might myself, call on you? Will you allow that I speak to you Herr Mister, therefore, kindly to help me?’

‘Yes! my good friend, of course I will help you,’ said Walter, a little impatiently. ‘You may trust me to keep my word. Look here! come to me to-morrow at this address, Jermyn Street, No. 9 Jermyn Street. Don’t

forget. Hah ! there is my cab. I must be off,' and he signalled to a smart-looking hansom, which speedily drew up in front of the theatre. 'Stay !' he added, as a thought struck him. 'Give me *your* address.'

'So ! this is my gard,' replied the German, pocketing the one Chessington had given him, and producing his own, which bore the inscription : 'Herr Karl, Professor of German, No. 9 Poulford Street.' 'Yes, that shall be my address.'

'I shan't forget you, Theodore,' answered the other, and giving him a kindly nod, he drove off. Herr Karl gazed after him wistfully for a moment, and then, heaving a great sigh, he plunged into the crowd, and was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

'That's queer !' said Norton. 'He called him Theodore, and Herr Karl said his name was Hoffbauer. Has he three names.'

'Perhaps two of them are christian names,' answered Wilfrid. 'Let us share a cab back to the lodgings. It's not our business after all, is it ?'

'No, that's true enough,' said Norton, as they hailed a passing hansom. 'But I wonder how a poor beggar like that could have become acquainted with a man of means like the other seems to be. It's not uncommon, you think ? well, perhaps not. I say, though its also no business of mine, may I ask how you got to know that lovely being in pink, and a gilt helmet, at the Momus ? Sly dog, sir ! sly dog !'

'No, I'm nothing of the kind, Norton,' replied Oakburne, with a forced laugh, 'though I own it looks like it ;' and as they drove home he told his friend how Lois Simcox was the schoolmaster's daughter down at home at Lidfield, and how he had saved her from drowning,


which he thought would be quite sufficient reasons to satisfy the other's curiosity. 'You see I could not help feeling surprised at seeing her in such a place,' said he.

'Yes, of course you must have been,' said Norton, rather drily. He was anything but inquisitive, but he could not help thinking that Wilfrid had not told him everything. On the other hand, however, he felt equally that he had no right to expect him to do so, and, as the cab here drew up at No. 9 Poulford Street, he soon forgot all about the matter, and the pair separated for the night on as good terms as ever.

CHAPTER XII.

Walter Chessington's Visitor.

This crowns his feast with wine and wit ;
Who brought him to that mirth and state ?
His betters, see, below him sit,
Or hunger hopeless at the gate.
Who bade the mud from Dives' wheel
To spurn the rags of Lazarus ?
Come, brother, in that dust we'll kneel,
Confessing Heaven that ruled it thus.—THACKERAY.

T was a good deal past ten o'clock when Walter Chessington sat down to breakfast in his chambers, in Jermyn Street, next morning. Rowan-court had steadily carried out the plans which he had formed regarding his nephew, who was in every way affording him satisfaction. Walter's ambition had been roused by the idea of entering into Parliamentary life. Looking after the property, and presiding at quarter sessions, varied by shooting and hunting when the season came round, were all very well for an elderly man, but for one just in his prime, who felt that he was perhaps capable of making some figure in the world of politics, such a course of life was almost contemptible. So at least he got to think in spite of the remonstrances of his sister Catherine, who did not at all approve of his new plans. 'They did not see much of him as it was,' she would say, 'and in future they would never see him at all. He would have to be perpetually entertaining political friends, and quite change their quiet happy life.

He would find out his mistake, and regret that he had neglected the duties that lay at his own door—which God had given him—just for the sake of gratifying their ambitious uncle.’

‘You silly little woman!’ Walter would reply when this gentle counsellor made such appeals, ‘Why should I neglect the duties that lie at my door? On the contrary, I shall be able to discharge them all the better. Women don’t understand these things,’ and he calmly pooh poohed all her protests. Catherine loved the quiet humdrum country life. Otterstone Hall and Otterstone village were the inner and outer circle of her affections, and the world beyond the radius of Clayshire had but little interest for her. To manage the household,—which she did admirably,—to minister to the wants of the poor, and be the directing spirit in church and school matters, satisfied all her ambitions; and as for pleasures she was fully contented with the routine of county gaities, the archery meetings in summer, the solemn dinner parties in winter, and the four or five balls which took place in the year. Her mother in her heart of hearts agreed with her views about Walter, but her pride in, and unconfessed ambition for her son, as well as the influence of her brother Giles, kept her silent. So Rowancourt and his nephew had gone up to London for the season, and the former had introduced Walter to all his friends, and was rejoiced to see how well he acquitted himself. Walter was fond of society, and to win the good opinions of his fellow-creatures was one of his strongest instincts. With such a disposition, good looks, and pleasant manners, he soon succeeded, therefore, in becoming popular, and entered with zest into all the amusements which life with ample means, and with the

entree into some of the best sets in London can offer ; going to everything worth going to, frequenting the clubs, and—though he did not really care for it—losing a little money at play and on the turf, because it seemed the right thing to do. Then too his uncle had taken him down to Lidfield on a visit to Lady Thistledale, and had introduced to him the Elkfields, and all the people whom it was his interest to know in that neighbourhood. Both had come away well satisfied with the results of their expedition, and now he was back again in London. Town was unusually full, there was a good deal of political excitement in the air, and Otterstone was rather dull, so Walter felt it advisable, all things considered, to take up his residence in Jermyn Street for a time.

As he sat over his breakfast, with the greasy card of 'Mr. Karl, Professor of German,' before him, all that was good and kindly in his disposition began to rise up, as it were, and enter into conflict with the dictates of selfish prudence. Here was a man who had saved his life, and to whom he had given a promise of help, coming to him in evident distress. He recalled the sad event which had happened at the period of their meeting, and his own feelings and views of men and life at that time, and thought with a little sigh how they had now changed. Then he should have had not the slightest hesitation as to aiding the man to whom he owed such a debt, and would have been eager to do so. Now he felt very grave doubts as to how he ought to treat him. They had met under exceptional circumstances ; he, Walter, had, after all, also first come to Hoffbauer's rescue ; the man's antecedents were the reverse of good—at least of respectable ; and might he not lay himself open to very

disagreeable annoyance by being kind to him? Would it not be wiser to treat him with some coldness, and to show that he was not a person to be imposed upon. He said to himself that that was what his uncle Giles would probably do in such a case, and, as he said so, there came a double knock at the door, and presently Herr Karl—whom the reader of course has long since identified with Theodore Hoffbauer—was ushered into the room. Walter with a slight flush, somewhat to his own surprise, and to the evident surprise of his well-bred servant—who was shocked to see his master greet so shabbily dressed a ‘person’—found himself shaking hands with him. Then, half regretting the action, he rather haughtily motioned him to a seat, and ordered his servant to take away the breakfast things, affecting to busy himself with some papers on the writing table, during the two minutes required for that process.

The difference in social conditions conveyed to a polite ear by the two names of Poulford Street and Jermyn Street could hardly be greater than the change evident in the appearance of each of these men since they had last met in Frankfort five years earlier. Time had developed the delicate youth into a handsome robust looking man, to whom the duties of ownership and constant intercourse with the world, had given a confidence and decision of manner in striking contrast to his old languid and somewhat irresolute address. All this his visitor took in at a glance, and with the slight sense of personal inferiority produced by the feeling that he was a petitioner to a man of some position. Walter on his part was not slow to notice how time had changed the turbulent, reckless socialist, who had saved his life from the infuriated mob and chastised the assassins of

Major von Auerswald and Prince Lichnowski. Though barely forty, his curly hair and beard were already sprinkled with gray, his eye had lost its fire, and his form much of the upright martial bearing, which Chessington had so much admired in him. Most of all, however, he was struck by the palor of the man's face, his emaciated and sickly appearance, and the look of suffering written on his brow and in his eyes. He felt moved by a sudden compassion which for the moment made him forget all his suspicious caution.

'You are not well, Hoffbauer,' said he, seating himself in the arm chair opposite to him. 'I fear the world has gone ill with you since you did me that service in Frankfurt. Let me hope that I can make you some return now.'

'I am ill, and I am fery fery poor, Mr. Jessington, replied the other. 'I am not strong as I was you see. I get not much food, because I have but little monaie. I fear that if I do not get the medicine and the food, I shall give up—what you call preak down. I want to get monaie.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' said Walter, amused somewhat at this naive address. 'But are you willing to work? I will give you money ; but you cannot live always on what I give you. You are a teacher of German, are you not?'

'Yes, I am a teacher of my native speech, sir. I am a German, as you know,' and he drew himself up proudly. 'Halle in Saxony is my native place. I instruct in the speech of my father-land. But I gannot speak well your English. Your masters of gymnasium will not employ me except the fery cheap ones. I get so leetle monaie that I can scarce live. And now this

month I shall have had no work, and I am getting too sick, yes! too sick to work! I am, therefore, without work, without monaie! How to buy food, how to get lodging, or medicine, I know not. What gan I do then?’

‘Humph! what have you been doing since we parted,’ asked Walter. ‘Have you been long in England,’ and he looked at him rather keenly, as a suspicion of imposture again came into his mind.

‘I see you doubt me, Mr. Jessington,’ said Hoffbauer, drawing himself up defiantly, and looking at him with something of his old fire. ‘It is natural, perhaps, you should doubt one so in rags clothed as I appear. But you need have no fear. I have been two years in your country, sir! weary, bitter, and hard years they have been to me! It is my own fault, perhaps! Ah yes, it is much my fault! But though I have been unwise, and wrong, I have nothing done to be ashamed of, Mr. Jessington! I see in your land the man is bad, is held to be a rascal, a spitzbube, who has the holes in his coat. You saved my life once too. It is enough, sir! I thank you, and I commend myself to you and say good-day, Mr. Jessington!’ and he rose, and with a proud glance prepared to leave the room.

‘Stop, stop, Hoffbauer!’ cried Walter, laying a hand on his shoulder. ‘Pardon me! you quite mistook me. I can bear witness to your courage and honour, and I owe you a debt which a man can never fully repay. Sit down and tell me all.’

His kind manner, and the sincerity of his tones, reassured the German, and touched him deeply. ‘Sir, you are goot, very goot to me. Pardon my anger, but I am still proud though I am a poor man. I thank you,

and I will tell you all. There is no reason why I should not. I have nothing done that I shame myself to tell.'

'That's right,' said Walter. 'Tell me.'

The German, with a look of deep gratitude, reseated himself, and then proceeded in a plain, straightforward way, that was good evidence of its veracity, to relate the story of his restless, wandering life.

Theodore Hoffbauer was the only child of a well-to-do merchant, and from his earliest years had been indulged in every wish. When, after a year's study of theology at his native university of Halle, then famous for its teachers of that science, he had expressed a desire to relinquish it for that of medicine, his parents gave up their darling project that he should enter the ministry, without a murmur, and cheerfully acquiesced in his proposal to enter himself at the neighbouring University of Leipsic. At Leipsic, however, he had got into a bad set, and led such a wild life that even his indulgent father became at last incensed at his extravagances and follies, and for a year forbad him the house. His mother then interceded for the young prodigal, who was freely forgiven, and for a time endeavoured to learn his father's business, and kept steadily to his desk. It was, however, but for a time. The dull routine of the counting-house, and the restraints of home, proved too wearisome for him, and once more he persuaded the parents who could not say him nay, to permit him to resume the study of medicine, this time at the University of Heidleberg. There he had made the acquaintance of Frederica Shroeder and her father, a Professor of Geology, and had formed an attachment to the girl which, he said, had it been allowed to terminate in a happy marriage, would have changed the whole course of his life. The Professor, however,

was altogether under the influence of a certain Reuben Pfeiffer—the Herr Reuben to whom the reader was introduced at Frankfort—who at that period was carrying on a thriving trade as a money-lender. This man, much to the grief of her mother—an Italian by birth, who had encouraged Theodore's suit,—had become deeply enamoured of Frederica, and persuaded her father to betroth her to him as a wiping off of all accounts. He cordially detested Theodore on account of the girl's marked preference for him, and therefore managed to get a hold over him by lending him money and introducing him to those who would help him to spend it till poor Hoffbauer found himself in greater difficulties than he had ever yet been. Both at Halle and Leipsic he had associated a good deal with those students—at that time very numerous—who supported the popular doctrines of radical reform, and his ability and reckless energy had always made him a leader among them. Through Reuben Pfeiffer, who encouraged such zealots for his own ends, he became acquainted at Heidleberg with a more turbulent set of Socialists than he had hitherto met with, and entering as usual heart and soul into their projects, speedily obtained a pre-eminence among them. At this time Mrs. Shroeder died, and Reuben compelled the Professor to resign his post at Heidleberg and settle at Frankfort, hoping thus to get rid of his troublesome rival. Hoffbauer, however, followed them thither, and made the girl confess to her father that she preferred him to Reuben Pfeiffer. The Professor was so completely under the sway of the latter, that he was forced against his own wishes to tell him that his daughter was irrevocably pledged to his rival; but Theodore refused to accept this decision, and Frederica, who was of age,

obstinately declined to marry Reuben, though her deep attachment to her father made her equally determined in resisting Hoffbauer's constant proposals that they should elope together. Thus a silent contest was perpetually going on between the two men, each of whom was so dependent on the other through their mutual connection with Socialist societies, that open violence or quarrelling was out of the question. Each had therefore to strive to attain his end by craft, and here Reuben's unscrupulous dishonesty served him in good stead. The zeal of the Liberalist reformers was, happily for him, constantly breaking forth into action, and their risings everywhere brought them into conflict with the ruling powers. Reuben, while he encouraged and affected to take part in these *émeutes*, always managed unknown to his comrades to give information to the Government of their preparation, and thus both to make a profit out of his perfidy, and also implicate such as he choose of his associates. Theodore's daring and skill were for a long time quite a match for his antagonist. Though many suffered, he always succeeded in escaping from the effects of Reuben's treachery, and at last, getting some inkling of it, managed, as he thought, to involve him so deeply in the conspiracy organised by the Socialists at Frankfort in 1848, that if it failed he should run an equal risk with his companions, while, if it succeeded, he should be exposed and punished for his baseness. But it was destined that Reuben's cunning should once more prevail. The events which took place at the rising have already been described. Reuben, in spite of his rival's care, managed before it began to make, as usual, a profit out of his information to the Police, and specially to implicate Hoffbauer ; but being warned that he must no longer

remain in Frankfort, he secretly removed all his ill-gotten wealth to Cologne. The reader will remember how, while Frederica and Chessington were watching the conflict in the streets on the memorable 18th of September, Reuben surprised them by returning, and thereby necessitating Walter's speedy retreat. While the latter was making his way back to his hotel, and before even the armistice of an hour was concluded, a creature of his own came by previous arrangement to Reuben with the news that all was lost, and that Hoffbauer was dead. To the latter statement he was able to give additional colour by the fact that Theodore had really been severely wounded in his rescue of Major von Auerswald, and had fainted from loss of blood. Affecting to be deeply moved by this intelligence, he persuaded the Professor that, having harboured Socialists, he was himself implicated in their proceedings, and that it was therefore necessary for him to fly at once from the city. He even showed him a forged warrant for his arrest, and so worked on the fears of the silly old man, and through him on his daughter, that they were induced to follow his advice and accompany him without delay to Cologne. There he used his forged warrant as a weapon against Frederica, and, by perpetual bullying, and by threats of denouncing her father if she refused, forced the unhappy girl, who fully believed Theodore to be dead, to marry him. Then Reuben determined to put the sea between him and the vengeance of Hoffbauer, whom he had every reason to fear was not only alive, but burning to repay the injuries he had done him. He therefore hurried his bride and her father to England. The hurry and fright were, however, too much for the now almost insane Professor, and he died soon after they reached London. Reuben

buried him with great decorum, and many protestations of grief, and then, assuming the name of Ledru, purchased the goodwill of a small restaurant in Leicester Square, which he enlarged and re-christened the 'Café Frankfort.' Poor Frederica was so crushed by all she had undergone, that in her despair she attempted self-destruction, and failing, sank for a time into a hopeless stupor, till her husband's continued brutality roused her to a sort of defiance. His coarse love had turned to bitter hatred when he found that she could only regard him with detestation. He had now more ample means than he had ever yet possessed, and prospered as such shrewd unscrupulous men usually do. He took revenge on his wife by every conceivable kind of insult and neglect, sometimes even beating her, and gave himself up to drink and his own pleasures, till even her high courage and resolution almost broke down. It was when in this frame of mind that she was suddenly aroused to new life by learning from a compatriot, who had known them both in Heidelberg, that Theodore Hoffbauer was still alive.

'Then Frederica and her husband are the proprietors of the Café Frankfort,' interrupted Walter. 'How did you find that out? Do they know you are in England?'

'Yes they know. She knows too well, poor soul! poor child! And he, he knows also, I think, though he suspects not that I have discovered him. He hates me, but he fears me as ever. Enough; I come presently to that.'

He then went on to relate how, in spite of his wound at Frankfort, he had managed to escape capture, and, after many months of wandering, had at last got back to Halle to find that during his

long absence from home his mother had died, and his father had married again. The latter, who had had serious losses in business, received his son with all his old affection, and, though he could not forbear from chiding the prodigal, would gladly have received him again in his house had not the part he had taken in the political disturbances made it unsafe for Theodore to remain in Halle. Even had this not been the case, however, his stepmother, who had a great antipathy for him, would have refused to live under the same roof with him. There was therefore no course left him but to go into exile ; and after, at great risk, paying a visit to Frankfort, where he heard from a friend an account of Reuben's conduct and the flight of the Professor, he had come to England and endeavoured to gain a livelihood by teaching. For a time his father, who had furnished him with the funds for his journey, regularly remitted him a small sum ; but during the last three months he had ceased to do so, telling him—evidently, as Hoffbauer said, at the instigation of his stepmother—that with his second family to maintain, and the increased expenses of his business, he could no longer help him. The result had been gradual starvation. ‘I cannot teach as they want it,’ said he. ‘The pupils mock my speech, and my coat which is shabby, and my torn shirt ; then I am angry and strike the insolent ones, and the director quarrels with me, and I go. And now I am getting ill, and I starve also.’

‘Poor fellow!’ said Walter. ‘It is a sad history—very sad! But I will try and help you. You have not told me yet, though, how you came to meet with Frederica and her husband.’

‘Oh, it is not much to tell,’ replied Hoffbauer. ‘It was one evening, some seven months back, when I was

walking through the place you call Bedford Square,—it was bright, fine weather, when the trees were still fresh and green,—and I saw her come forth from a house near one corner of this square. I knew at once it was she—anywhere, of course, I should have known her—and I hurried, for she was beyond me, and she did not see me. So I did overtake her, and said, “Frederica!” That was all! Ah, my God! how she did start, poor child! For she has known my voice; of course, at once she has known it! “I have come back, my dear,” I said; “I have found thee at last!” Dear heaven! I was happy then for a moment, and cared not for any mans that was passing, no not I! I embraced her in my arms. Poor child! she turned white like the death! “It is too late, Theodore,” she cried; “too late!”—that was all,—and his voice choked, and his head sank on his breast.

Walter pitied him from the bottom of his heart. Good heavens! here was he rolling in wealth, with everything that selfish desire or ambition could want ready at his command, and this poor soul, whose faults after all were the faults of a rash, generous temperament, was slowly starving to death, and deprived of his home, his love, and all that he held most dear! He resolved at once to help him, and a thousand ways of doing so flashed into his brain. Yes! there was no doubting his story! he must help him! But he must think the matter over carefully first before deciding on any plan. ‘And she told you everything that happened since you parted?’ said he.

‘Yes! everything! Ah! it makes me mad to think of these things! Donnerwetter! that villain! was there ever before so accursed a wretch on this earth? Never,

never!’ And he rose and paced the room excitedly. ‘But enough! I ask your pardon, Herr Jessington,—I am out of myself. Pardon! She has helped me, poor child, with the little she can; but it is nothing. He gives her nothing, he who has always so much money. Ah! the accursed villain!’ and his manner became so wild that Walter felt it was better to put an end to the conversation.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I have no more time to spare now. I will write to you, Hoffbauer, to-night or to-morrow morning, and let you know whether I cannot get you some pleasanter and more remunerative work than teaching. Meantime take this,’ and he gave him a ten-pound note. ‘It will help you along. And now, goodbye. No! it is nothing, my friend. Remember, you saved my life.’

‘Ah, Herr Jessington!’ replied the poor fellow, with a hoarse voice and with tears in his eyes. ‘God bless you!’ He took Walter’s two hands in his own in his demonstrative German fashion, and shook them fervently. ‘God bless you!’ he repeated, ‘you have been very good to me—very good to me.’

‘Poor fellow!’ said Chessington to himself as he heard the house door close on his visitor, ‘I must help him somehow. What a queer jumble of misery and happiness life is! I wonder what my uncle would say to all this! By Jove, it’s half-past twelve, and I promised to meet that man at the club at twelve!’ and he hurried off to keep his appointment.

Meanwhile the man whose necessities he had relieved walked from his door with rapid steps and hat slouched over his brows, causing more than one passer by to pause and stare at his wild looks and powerful frame. Half mechanically he passed down St. James Street into Pall

Mall, and, turning by Marlborough House, entered St. James's Park ; and then his space slackened and his expression grew quieter. It was a mild, rather hazy morning, but enough sunlight struggled through the mists to make a pleasant warmth. A few loafers huddled on benches, or prone on the ground, were sleeping off the last night's debauch. Little bands of ragged children were playing by the ornamental lake, mingling their cries with those of the water-fowl, and a few nursemaids, whose care of their little charges was for the most part divided by that of listening to the sweet converse of a red-coated admirer, were strolling under the trees.

Hoffbauer sought out an unoccupied bench by the water and sat down full of thought. All that he had told Chessington of his history was perfectly true, for with all his faults he had an instinctive scorn of deceit. Walter's kindness had deeply touched his sense of gratitude. 'It is a joyful and pleasant thing to be thankful,' if the thankfulness begets feelings of contrition in him who feels it, and Chessington's reception of him at a critical point in his fortunes had thus affected him. Yes ! he had lived a selfish evil life, and his troubles had sprung from the seed he had himself sown. His mind wandered back to his childhood. He recalled the form of the mother who had loved him so tenderly, and whom he should never see again, and all the lavish kindness which his parents had showered on him. He had not been a ragged uncared for little wretch like those poor children playing so happily yonder, but had had all that money could give him from his birth up, until of his own choice he became a lawless wanderer. What return had he made for the affection that had been lavished on him ? He covered his face with his hands. It was all

gone now. The irrevocable past had been wasted and its gifts flung aside with scorn. But what of the future? Was it going to be brighter and better? This young Englishman had promised him help! Ah! how good he had been to him, he who knew him so little! Truly he had been to him a good Samaritan in word and deed. He had promised him help! Might he not perhaps open to him a better future? And hope, baseless and vague, but still hope, began to rise again within him. The chimes of Big Ben rang out their slow measured cadence, and then one after another the neighbouring clocks proclaimed the news that another hour had died. Yes! please God, he might yet atone in some measure for the wasted years, and a silent prayer that it might be so filled his heart.

‘Hast thou then forgotten me?’ asked a low voice close beside him.

‘Frederica!’ he cried, and started to his feet; and for once he felt sorry to see her. Was not her presence at the moment when his heart was full of better thoughts, an omen of ill?

‘Thou art not pleased to see me, then?’ said she, pouting. ‘Were we not to have met at the far entrance half-an-hour ago? I have stood close to thee these five minutes, and thou didst not heed. Tell me, what did he say?’

‘Ah! Frederica! he has been very, very good to me,’ cried Hoffbauer; and she took his arm, and as they walked slowly by the waterside he recounted his interview with Chessington.

‘And thou!’ he said, when he had concluded and his companion had expressed her pleasure at the success

of his mission. 'Is it not dangerous that thou art so long away from him?'

'I am calling on Madam Rovelli,' replied Frederica, with a laugh. 'He has business as usual, and one of his drinking fits is coming on.'

An expression of mingled anger and pain passed over Hoffbauer's face. 'Ah yes! I had forgot,' he said with a sigh.

'Thou art bad company to-day, Theodore,' said the lady, rather pettishly. 'But, poor fellow, thou art ill, I see,' added she tenderly, as she looked at his pale, haggard face. 'Come! I must return, and thou shalt spend this money in food and medicine and clothes.'

'Ah, Frederica! I am sad, it is true, and but a poor companion. Perhaps it is because I feel so weak and ill just now. Yes, it is better that we part now. I have been thinking ——— but it is nothing. Another time I will tell thee. And now, goodbye, my darling! Kiss me, and we will part.'

'Why art thou, then, so sorrowful?' replied Frederica; but she did not refuse the kiss he asked, and then they left the park in silence, and Hoffbauer having signalled to a cab, handed her into it.

'Remember that on Tuesday at twelve I go to Madam Rovelli's,' whispered Frederica as they shook hands. 'Adieu!' cried Hoffbauer, waving his hand, with a sad smile, 'adieu!' and he made his way slowly down the Strand.

Theodore had resolved in his heart that that adieu should be the last. He could not trust himself again with Frederica; and he said to himself that if he and Reuben met, it should be only to decide which should die first. Once only had he seen his enemy by chance

in the street, and then he had seen him turn pale and tremble at the recognition, and had felt a fierce pleasure in the terror he inspired. With Frederica he had had many meetings when she went to the house in Bedford Square where a wealthy and childless relative of her mother's resided, with whom Reuben, ever alive to the chance of making money, encouraged her to keep up an intercourse. The proprietor of the Café Frankfurt, as has been already hinted, now went his own way, though he managed to keep a certain watch over his wife, and having become a greater drinker than ever, he at times was seized with a fit which incapacitated him from attending to his business, which he would then entrust to a manager, making Frederica preside in the room while he retired to his villa in St. John's Wood to recover his faculties. Hence, as we have seen, Theodore had been able with impunity on such occasions to go to the Café Frankfurt and conduct Madam Ledru to the theatre. But now he resolved that these clandestine meetings must cease. He would try to live without seeing her—if it were possible. He would try and do some honest work, and wait patiently for what the future should bring him.

Full of such thoughts, he bent his steps homewards. He would write to his father, he thought, and tell him of this interview with Chessington. Then, too, he must clothe himself decently, and he must see some doctor and get him to cure the strange pains that he had been feeling so long in his head, and make him give him something to strengthen him a little. He felt weaker than usual just now, and as he passed an eating-house he bethought him for the first time that he had had nothing but a crust and a cup of coffee that day, and must dine.

He entered, and ordering a substantial meal, sat down and tried to spell his way through the paper that lay on the table. At all times the reading of English was a matter of some difficulty to him, but to-day it seemed harder than ever. The letters seemed to dance about before his eyes, and to take shapes that did not belong to them. There had been a great battle somewhere, he gathered, and that was all. 'There has been a great fight?' he asked the waiter who brought the steaming plate of beef he had ordered.

'Yes, sir,' replied the latter, seeing he was a foreigner; 'the battle of Oltenitza'—(he pronounced it 'Ollinutsur')—'between the Turks and the Rooshians, sir, and the Rooshians has got a good beating, they say.'

'So!' replied Hoffbauer, smiling. 'So! I am glad! I should like well to have taken my part! Yes!' and he recalled his conflicts with the Prussian and Austrian troops in his wild Socialist days. 'Ah yes! I have fought also in battle, my friend—often! yes!'

'Have'ee now, sir?' said the waiter, thinking he was a jolly-looking fellow, and noting his big powerful frame. 'Have'ee *indeed!* Well I never was that way myself, but anyhow I'm glad they've beaten the Rooshians,' and he hurried off to attend to another order.

Hoffbauer, to his surprise, found himself very hungry, and ate and drank voraciously. All the time, however, he felt strangely heavy and stupid, and at last he leant back and closed his eyes.

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'Hey! was ist?' he cried suddenly, in German.

The waiter was standing by him laughing, with his hand on his shoulder. 'You've been asleep this three hour, sir!' said he. 'I didn't like to wake yer, sir,

because yer did seem so tired, and we're always slack in an afternoon. But it's gettin' on for six now, sir.'

'Ah so! I was very tired! I thank you, my good fellow!' and he paid his bill, not forgetting a gratuity to the good-natured lad, and still feeling strangely heavy and stupid, set out homewards. The chilly night air reminded him that he required an overcoat, and he entered a ready-made clothes shop in the window of which several were temptingly displayed, and bought one. The shop was a corner one, and as he stepped out a man, hurrying from the opposite side, stumbled and fell, just as a heavy dray cart came thundering down the cross street into the Strand. The emergency aroused him. He darted forward and dragged the fallen man out of the way, just before the ponderous vehicle reached him. He whom he had rescued rose breathless and muddy, and stammered forth his thanks, as the little crowd, always in readiness in London, gathered round them. Hoffbauer stepped back with an exclamation. It was Reuben Pfeiffer! 'Ha!' he cried in German; 'we meet again, then!'

Reuben started and grew deadly pale. 'I thank thee, Hoffbauer,' murmured he in the same language.

'It is better so! Thou hast not deserved this from me, Reuben! But enough! it is good!' and he turned and strode along the street, scarce knowing where he went. He had saved the life of the man whom that morning he would have been ready to murder! He laughed aloud, a strange laugh that made those who heard it stare at him. 'It is better so!' he repeated. 'Yes! I am thankful!' The strange pain in his head suddenly came on him, and made him feel quite faint. He entered the lighted porch of a theatre, and began

mechanically to read the playbill. As he did so he felt so weak that he was fain to sit down on a stool which some official of the house had deserted. . . .

‘Come, sir! you must move out of this or I must call a policeman!’ He started. He had been asleep again. A dapper little check-taker was standing in front of him full of wrathful authority.

‘Pardon, sir!’ said Hoffbauer, rising. ‘I have felt myself unwell,’ and he went out. A clock in a shop opposite showed him that it was past eight. He would go straight home and rest.

He felt a little relieved by the sleep and the fresh air, and looking around him realised that he had come a good deal out of his way. He soon retraced his steps, but as he walked he felt himself grow weaker and weaker. The Gray’s Inn Road seemed interminable, and, as he stumbled down the ill-lighted thoroughfare, all sorts of strange fancies shaped themselves in his brain. Now he thought he was back again in his native town of Hallé, and seemed to recognise the old familiar buildings; or he was at Heidelberg once more, standing with Frederica on the old bridge that spans the beautiful Neckar, or sitting beneath the castle far up on the height above. Ah no! It was still the dreary street. Would it never end! Certainly he felt strangely weak, and an intolerable weight seemed to be oppressing his brain. On! past flaring gas-lamps and dingy shops, through a crowd of ill-dressed grimy men and women, chattering and laughing and jeering. He must get home. On again. Where was he? Ah yes! that was the turning; and he passed out of the main road into a quieter street, and began ascending the slight ascent to Poulford Square. Then he began to fancy that he was swimming in the

river Saale at Hallé, in which he used to bathe as a boy, struggling for his life against the strong current that flowed from the weir past the bathing place. His heart began to beat painfully, and his breath to grow shorter. 'A few more strokes,' he cried aloud, 'and I shall reach it.'

A timid medical student returning from a quiet pipe with a friend, overheard him, and stopped and stared after him with alarm, thinking he was an escaped lunatic. Hoffbauer did not see him though he had passed close to him. Had he been asked where he was going, he could not have given a rational answer, though his instinct was leading him straight to the place. His limbs grew weaker and weaker, and a sudden darkness seemed to be creeping over everything, but still he struggled on. 'Ah! at last!' he cried, 'the shore at last!' and he stumbled up the steps of No. 9 Poulford Street. Then he realised for a moment where he was. He managed to grasp the bell and ring a startling peal, and then a mortal faintness seized him, and when the door was opened he fell forward senseless on the threshold.

'Oh goodness! whatever shall I do!' cried the startled Mrs. Hollis. 'Mr. Chipps, sir! Mr. Throckmorton! Oh dear! Do come! Here's Mr. Karl in a dead faint! And I never knew him intoxicated; and him so quiet always! Oh, sir, what shall I do?'

It so happened that the little fraternity at the lodgings had assembled in Mr. Throckmorton's room to listen to a reading of a certain story which Mr. Beverley Chipps was about to bring out, and on which he wished to consult his friends, and they all four rushed immediately into the passage.

'He's screwed,' said Beverley Chipps, that being the

first idea which presented itself to his convivial temperament, an idea which was strengthened by the fact that his reading had been unceremoniously interrupted at a peculiarly interesting point.

‘It certainly looks rather like it,’ said Mr. Throckmorton, peering at the prostrate man through his double eye-glass. He, too, was rather incensed at being disturbed in this sudden fashion.

The two younger men were, however, wiser in this instance than their seniors.

‘No; it’s worse than that,’ said Norton, who with Wilfrid had knelt down and was examining Hoffbauer’s pulse and heart. ‘He’s not drunk, is he, Oakburne? I fear it is far more serious.’

Wilfrid agreed with him. ‘He certainly is not drunk,’ said he, ‘or if he is, it has resulted in something like paralysis of the brain. Feel how cold he is.’

‘Perhaps you’d better get a doctor,’ suggested Mr. Throckmorton.

‘I’ll be off for Dr. Block!’ cried Norton, ‘if you fellows will carry him to one of the rooms. Yours is nearest, Oakburne. This is a serious case, if I know anything about it’; and in two minutes the good-natured fellow was tearing off in a hansom to St. Christopher’s Hospital. The other three carried the senseless man into Oakburne’s room, but they had scarcely laid him on the bed when he began raving and gesticulating in such an alarming way that it required their united efforts to keep him down till the doctor arrived.

‘A very bad case of brain fever,’ said the latter, after he had made his examination, ‘brought on probably by some strong mental excitement acting on a terribly weakened system. The poor fellow’s absolutely emaci-

ated ! Look at his arm ! He must have been almost starving.'

'Something very like it,' said Norton and Wilfrid, and Mrs. Hollis corroborated the statement.

Of course there was no more reading that night, and each did what he could to aid in attending to the sufferer.

'He'll be better now,' said Dr. Block, as he took his leave after having done all that was possible for his patient. 'He may pull through. He's evidently a very strong man with a good constitution ; but he'll be on his back for weeks, and it will be touch and go with him. Good night, gentlemen.'

CHAPTER XIII.

In which 'misfortunes never come singly.'

What had'st thou to do being born,
Mother, when winds were at ease,
As a flower of the spring-time of corn,
A flower of the foam of the seas?
For bitter thou wast from thy birth,
Aphrodite, a mother of strife;
For before thee some rest was on earth,
A little respite from tears,
A little pleasure of life;
For life was not then as thou art,
But as one that waxeth in years.
Sweetspoken, a fruitful wife;
Earth had no thorn, and desire
No sting, neither death any dart.—SWINBURNE.

THE reader will recollect that when he parted from Reginald Oakburne that gentleman had just been delighted by the unexpected news that his regiment was under orders to proceed to the station to which he knew the Beechcrofts had already gone. The prospect of seeing Sybil for the time drove all other matters out of his mind, and he looked forward, as lovers will do, to a happy ending to his courtship, quite unaware of a new actor on the scene, who was destined to put an end to all his castles in the air.

When General Beechcroft had learned from his daughter, who was accustomed to confide everything to him, all the particulars of the little episode at Galle in

which she had played such a prominent part, and a more or less true account of which somehow became known to all their fellow-passengers, he felt more than ever that his daughter required a chaperon to look after her. He therefore determined to write home by the earliest mail to his widowed sister, Lady Felsparley, begging her to come out to him, and the latter, who before his departure had offered to accompany him to India, had at once accepted his invitation. When therefore Reginald went to pay his first call he found that lady and her daughter installed as members of the General's household.

Lady Felsparley was a thorough woman of the world, who had married her late husband, a captain in a dragoon regiment, as much from the prospective advantages to be gained from his being a nephew of Lord Glenshale and thus akin to the family of the great Duke of Graniteshire, as from affection. Having a great deal of shrewdness and tact she found herself, as head of General Beechcroft's household, able to indulge pretty unrestrainedly that love of managing other people's business which was the prominent impulse of her nature. In her brother and daughter she found obedient subjects enough, but with respect to her niece Sybil the case was very different. That young lady, a high-spirited girl, already a little spoilt by being always allowed to have her own way, not only found herself ousted by her aunt from the position she had hitherto occupied—a trial to which, all things considered, she submitted with a very fair grace—but also soon discovered that she was now under the supervision of a lynx-eyed guardian, who endeavoured to direct and control all her actions. To this kind of surveillance Miss Beechcroft was, as has been said, quite unused, and she chafed and fretted not a little under it. Her affec-

tion for her father made her put up with a great deal for his sake, but at times her haughty temper would get the better of her, and sharp battles would take place between Lady Felsparley and herself.

Reginald Oakburne's attentions were one of the points on which they found themselves constantly at issue. Lady Felsparley objected on principle to love matches, which she really thought not only silly, but absolutely wrong, being of opinion that means and position should occupy the first place in the consideration of such questions, and that affection, if it entered at all into the matter, should be kept in entire subordination to them. As soon, therefore, as she discovered—which it was not hard to do—the feelings of her niece and Oakburne for each other, and had satisfied herself that the latter was not a desirable *parti*, she at once proceeded to let Sybil know her opinion on the subject. Mr. Oakburne was only a subaltern in a marching regiment, with but a miserable pittance of his own; he was a Roman Catholic; his family might perhaps be old, but it was now of no account, and he was merely a country doctor's son. It was madness for Sybil to think of marrying such a man; and her ladyship discoursed on the dangers of mixed marriages, the evils of poor marriages, duty to parents, proper feeling for her position, and other truths bearing on the subject, in a way which was very sensible and impressive, for she had had much experience of the world, and could illustrate her admonitions by numerous examples. As for Oakburne, Lady Felsparley felt herself bound to snub him and discourage him as much as possible, and the young fellow did not better his cause with her by a foolish speech which he made about her in public.

He happened one evening in the billiard-room to allude to Lady Felsparley’s weakness for talking of the Duke of Granitshire and her other great relations, a peculiarity which soon became well known throughout the station, and of which most of the young men, military and civilian, used to make joke. One of the men in the room, who was much smitten with the charms of Miss Evelyn Felsparley, and to whom Evelyn’s mother—on account of the young officer being the heir to a baronetcy—showed herself very kindly disposed, warmly took up the cudgels on her behalf. There being a good many in the room the dispute waxed warm, and Reginald in the heat of the moment bet his friend, who was going to dine with him at the General’s the next night, that Lady Felsparley would mention her aristocratic connections ten times during the evening. He won his little bet ; but some kind friend carried the story to her ladyship, whose disapproval of him was, as may be supposed, changed thereby into intense dislike. She became more opposed to him than ever, and when Oakburne, having won Sybil’s consent, summoned up his courage to apply for that of General Beechcroft to his marriage with her, Lady Felsparley was able to revenge herself very completely on him. The General, though he liked Reginald personally, did not dare to act in the matter without consulting his sister, and the latter spoke so strongly, and as it seemed to him wisely, against the match, that, with great sorrow to himself, he was obliged to tell his young friend that he must not dream of a union with his daughter. It would be unwise, undesirable in every way. He was very sorry, he had been himself to blame in the matter in not checking ‘this—this unfortunate attachment. It’s very hard to me to say this, Oakburne. You

know I have a great regard for you, my boy; but—I feel it is better not; and that—that also is Lady Felsparley’s opinion. Yes, sir, I’m afraid its impossible! So try and bear your sorrow, my dear fellow—and for the future you will feel yourself that it will be better that you should see as little as possible of Sybil—for a time, at least.’

It is hardly necessary to say with what anger and dismay the lovers received this decision; but remonstrance was useless, and they were obliged to part, contenting themselves with mutual protestations of eternal constancy. Miss Beechcroft found a warm sympathiser in her cousin Evelyn, who, though she stood far too much in awe of her to dream of telling her so, considered that her mother had acted ‘*most* unkindly and *most* unjustly’ in the matter. Oakburne at first sought consolation by imparting his grievances to Danvers, the friend with whom he had made the unlucky bet; but the latter, though a good-natured fellow, could not quite stand all his denunciations of Miss Felsparley’s mother, and as he frankly told him so, Reginald had to forbear from speaking his mind with regard to her. He had indeed reason to believe that Captain Cope, with whom he was on far more intimate and affectionate terms, to some extent shared his views respecting General Beechcroft’s sister, but he was restrained by natural delicacy from talking much to him on the subject, because he knew that Cope—who, of course, saw Lady Felsparley constantly—cherished an affection for Miss Beechcroft, which her aunt not unnaturally regarded with a good deal of favour, since he had, as has been said, ample means, and would, if he lived, inherit a fortune. Hence, having no confidant to whom he could unbosom himself, the young

officer began to brood a good deal alone over his ill fortune, and his friends began to remark that he was not half such good company as he used to be.

One evening, however, as Reginald was sitting, with a cigar for companion, fretting over his troubles; his native servant glided into the verandah and presented to him a little twisted note.

'Chit, sare, from big bungalow ; peoples answer, wait, sare,' said the 'boy,' who had come with Oakburne from Madras, and like many of the servants in that presidency, could speak English after a fashion, and he stood motionless and impassive before his master, who started as he heard that the note came from 'big bungalow,' which he knew meant General Beechcroft's house.

'Who brought it?' cried he fiercely, when he had read the direction.

'Woman, sare—ayah woman, sare,' says the fellow, beginning to show signs of alarm, for he had had some experience of the humours of British masters. 'She wait outside, sare, in compound.'

'Let her wait till I call you, then, Lachman,' growled Oakburne, tearing open and devouring his note, which, as the reader will perhaps have divined, was from Miss Beechcroft. He opened it in dread, wondering if it was a dismissal from her own lips, but his mind was agreeably relieved on seeing its contents.

'She had read his dear letter,' said the fair writer, the 'dear letter' being a very fervent petition to her not to yield to Lady Felsparley's tyranny which he had sent to her the day before. 'She would never *never* submit to the *unjust* persecutions of her *cruel* aunt, or consider her father's decision as final, &c., &c. The bearer of this note was *thoroughly trustworthy*. If, as he said, he

really must see her again, she (the bearer) could guide him to a place where they could meet without fear. But perhaps, &c., &c., &c.'

It need hardly be said that the 'thoroughly trustworthy' messenger who had brought this important epistle took back a similar one, couched in very ardent language, to her young mistress. In fact, Miss Beechcroft and her lover being prevented from meeting openly, began to do so in secret, and Caliamé, the ayah, and Oakburne's 'boy' Lachman, found themselves constantly engaged in acting as confidential letter carriers.

In spite, however, of trustworthy messengers, and the observance of all precautions, Lady Felsparley before very long discovered their secret. It struck her as strange that Sybil should so soon recover from the depression into which her father's decision had plunged her, and should actually appear to be in better spirits than ever, behaving in the most provoking manner with regard to several most eligibly '*partis*,' and flirting outrageously with all sorts of 'detrimentals.' Her suspicions were therefore aroused, and when her ladyship really tried to get to the bottom of a matter of this kind, she seldom failed. Somehow the faithful Lachman was caught in the act of delivering a note to the trustworthy Caliamé, who, though she managed to screen herself by her audacious denials and equivocations, failed to save her young mistress, to whom she was really attached, from discovery. Lady Felsparley, with the knowledge of their secret engagement once in her possession, was able to come down in triumph on Sybil. The latter was quite terrified by her aunt's threats to inform General Beechcroft of the affair, for she could not bring herself to face the anger and indignation which she knew that

indulgent parent would feel when he heard of her conduct. He had the greatest contempt for deceit, and Sybil, who also had naturally strong antipathy to it, and had only allowed herself to be overpersuaded into it by her lover, could not endure the thought that her father should know how she had acted. Hence Lady Felsparley, by threatening and cajoling, was able to put a stop to the correspondence and meetings with Oakburne, who, receiving no answer to his letters and being suddenly cut off from all communication with Miss Beechcroft, grew almost beside himself with anxiety and hopeless love. His perplexity and trouble were further increased by the fact that, as his ‘boy’ Lachman had been bribed to silence, he was for a long time ignorant of the cause of Sybil’s unexpected change of conduct; and when he at last discovered how this had been brought about, the young lady herself had been persuaded into parting with him.

After a great deal of manœuvring, Lady Felsparley had induced her niece—reluctantly enough indeed—to listen more favourably to the addresses of Captain Cope, whom she had always liked, and who, believing his friend Oakburne to be finally dismissed, now came forward openly as her suitor. This she had chiefly accomplished by poisoning Sybil’s mind by reports about poor Reginald’s fastness and extravagance. The luckless youth, when his love troubles became unbearable, sought relief in a course of counter excitement, which ended in his losing more money than he could afford at play and over a horse of his own which he had thought fit to back heavily for a certain race. In short, he became desperate, and began living in a reckless way that made his friends and brother officers **shake their heads**, and hint that ‘poor

Oakburne was going to the bad.' Of all this Lady Felsparley made immense capital. Never were slanders more baseless and more unkind than those whispered about Reginald ; but an Indian station, it is hardly necessary to say, is a more fruitful soil for scandal than is perhaps to be found anywhere else in the world. Lady Felsparley was of course only too willing to believe that he was a confirmed gambler and drunkard, and it was by dinning this supposed ill-doing of Reginald's into her niece's ears, and by continued comments on his 'wicked extravagant life,' that she at last brought her up to the pitch of indignation against him which she desired. When Oakburne made one more passionate appeal to her in a letter which he himself delivered openly at the Beechcrofts' bungalow, Sybil, on condition that her aunt still kept the matter concealed from the General, wrote back a cold and studied note, in which she told him that, 'after all she had learnt of his mode of life, she felt that it was better for them both that they should part, and that she deeply regretted her conduct in having entered into an engagement with him contrary to the wish of her dear father.'

When Reginald received this carefully written epistle and the little parcel containing the ring and the one or two little trinkets he had given her, the poor fellow felt quite stunned. He read it over and over again, scarcely able to believe his eyes, for he had still been hoping against hope that all must come right. 'His mode of life'! What could it mean? His anger and sorrow were for the time neutralised by his surprise, and a sense of despair that seemed to numb all his energies. He was to ride in the garrison steeple chases that day a horse called 'Boston,' belonging to his friend Danvers,

‘Boston’ was first favourite, and Oakburne, who had some reputation as jockey, had looked forward to the result as a pleasant certainty. Sybil’s note, however, for the time almost unnerved him. He went down to the course like a man in a dream, and with such a white sad face that his friends could not help noticing it, and the owner of ‘Boston’ asked with some concern if he felt up to riding. He rallied for the moment, and declared laughingly that he would certainly ride and intended to win, and when he was mounted, and the horses had had their preliminary canter, he felt once more up to his work and ready to ride at anything. The four horses that came to the post were despatched at the first attempt to a capital start. For the first few fences Boston lay about a dozen lengths behind the others, Fusileer, the second favourite, taking the lead. At the eighth fence, a double, the latter, however, fell, and the race now seemed virtually over, for Oakburne, bringing up ‘Boston,’ was first over the water jump, and held a long lead up to the last fence, a rather awkward looking mud wall. Just before reaching it, however, the horse was seen to stumble, and, though his rider pulled him together, jumped short and fell, and ‘the Clown,’ a horse that everyone had looked on as an outsider, came up with a rush, and galloped in an easy winner. Oakburne was taken up senseless, with a broken collar bone, and these injuries were aggravated by a bad attack of fever, which much delayed his recovery, and left him so weak that he was ordered up to the hills to recruit.

As he was gradually recovering strength in the delightful air of the little hill station, there came one day to the hotel a man in the Forest Department whose acquaintance he had made before his return to England. Having

passed through Kurryapore on his way up, he was full of the news of the place, which he poured forth in a continuous stream to Reginald, who listened with but languid interest, as they sat together at breakfast one morning. He scarcely took in a tithe of all his companion told him concerning Jack and Tom, Mr. Black and Miss White, and all the scandals of the station; and he was beginning to feel greatly bored, when the mention of Cope's name aroused him.

'Then you know Cope? of course. He's A.D.C. to General Beechcroft,' said his companion.

'I should rather think I did,' answered Oakburne. 'Well, what about him?'

'Cope's engaged to be married to Miss Beechcroft, and everybody says it's an awfully good match. He's got plenty of money. What's the matter?'

Reginald had turned quite white and given vent to a strange exclamation, half pain, half surprise. 'It's my arm,' said he. 'It's not healed properly, and sometimes gives me awful pain,—makes me feel quite faint. Thanks, I shall be all right directly.' But he soon after said he would go and lie down for a bit, and it may be imagined that his frame of mind was not an enviable one as he lay in the room assigned to him and pondered over the news he had heard, not knowing whether to believe it or no.

The next day he resolved to return, some days earlier than he was due, at Kurryapore. He felt determined to find out the truth about Cope's rumoured engagement, and if it was true, to show Miss Beechcroft and the world in general that her faithlessness did not distress him. But it was destined that sickness should delay him in these manful intentions. At the Dâk Bungalow

at which he first stopped on his way down, he was seized with a sudden attack of cholera, and had it not been for the kindness of Captain M'Cormont and his wife and daughter, who were on their way to the hills and insisted on taking him back with them, poor Reginald's career would have ended then and there. In India, however, the part of the good Samaritan is acted oftener than in our colder climate. These worthy people—Miss Dora M'Cormont was already married, and her sister Cora was on the high road to be so—nursed the young officer as if he had been their own son, and he made such satisfactory progress that he was able to return with them to Kurryapore. They knew of course a good deal about his unfortunate attachment and his troubles, and assured him that they had heard nothing of Miss Beechcroft's engagement. The good-natured Cora,—who had long since become on most friendly terms with her,—could not forbear from writing to Sybil a very particular account of Oakburne, of course dwelling much on his illness, his melancholy, poor fellow ! and his great devotion to—etc. etc. She got a very warm letter from Miss Beechcroft in reply, thanking her for her kindness, and for the news she had given, and confiding to her friend something of the real state of the case, but still saying nothing with regard to Captain Cope. Reginald, who of course was not aware of what Miss M'Cormont had done, parted from his friends with sincere regret, and with a feeling of gratitude which lasted during his life. He went back to his duties softened and comforted by their kindness, which served much to cure the bitterness and anger which he had been inclined to cherish against General Beechcroft and his family. He soon ascertained that his friend of the Forest Department had been pre-

mature in his announcement with regard to Sybil. There had been no definite engagement, but Cope was known to be paying the young lady great attentions, and everybody said that it '*must* soon end in that.' Oakburne got but little consolation from this information. He felt that Sybil was now lost to him for ever, no matter whom she might eventually marry. He would rather, indeed, it should be his friend than another. Still it may be imagined that even Damon would have preferred avoiding Pythias, if the latter had eventually carried off the prize among women on which Damon had set his heart, and Oakburne, though he still felt the same regard for him, now avoided Cope. As time went on he grew more and more moody and discontented, and longed for some change which would take him away from his sorrows, till at last the news of the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey reached India. Then came the tidings of the spring campaign, and of the siege of Silistria, and of the gallantry of Nasmyth and Butler. Oakburne, like so many of his comrades, was fired by these accounts. He had a considerable amount of leave due to him, and determined at all events to go to the scene of war and witness, if he could not take part in, the stirring scenes which were being enacted there. Somewhat to his surprise his friend Danvers, when informed of his plans, offered to join him. He too had reasons which made him anxious for change, for his uncle, Sir Leopold, had unexpectedly married again in his old age, and Lady Felsparley had ceased to welcome his visits. So having obtained the necessary leave the pair bid adieu to Kurryapore, and sailed per steamer for Alexandria, whence they purposed to make their way to the Danube.

Oakburne little knew what a service Miss Cora M'Cormont had done him, by writing as above related, to her friend Miss Beechcroft. Her letter had reached Sybil just as she was beginning to yield to the pressure put upon her by her aunt, and indeed by her father and cousin also, to accept Captain Cope. The news of her old lover's illness and sorrow touched her very deeply. She had learnt that nearly all that she had been told about his 'wicked and extravagant life' was untrue. Her conscience smote her for her behaviour to him, and she began to dislike her aunt more than ever for her share in the matter. After much secret grief and perplexity of spirit she resolved that she could not marry Captain Cope. She would never anger her father by again listening to Reginald Oakburne—if indeed he had not ceased to care to make her listen to him—but she had given her heart to Reginald, and she would never marry anyone else. So, to the intense vexation of her family, she refused Cope's offer, and told them in reply to their remonstrances that she intended to 'live and die an old maid.' That officer bore his disappointment with manly silence and resolution. His was not an excitable temperament like Oakburne's, and he could look at disagreeable things with a calmer judgment. Moreover he was comforted by the assurances of her aunt and father that Sybil must before long change her mind, and the hopes they expressed that he would not be discouraged by this first rebuff. So the result of this proposal was kept a profound secret from the gossips of Kurryapore, and Reginald heard nothing of it till years afterwards. He departed from Kurryapore with but little regret; and as he was making his way, full of prospects of honours to be won, to the seat of war, Sybil was beginning to feel

that her resolve to 'live and die an old maid,' though heroic, entailed a painful amount of melancholy and regret.

CHAPTER XIV.

What the world said of him.

The man that mentioned *him*, at once dismissed
 All mercy from his lips, and sneer'd and hiss'd ;

—COWPER.

THOUGH both Mr. Throckmorton and Wilfrid got letters bearing the Kurryapore post mark, which informed them of some of the facts narrated in the last chapter, the former had no idea that Wilfrid's brother was at all concerned in the trouble and anxiety which General Beechcroft told his friend he had been experiencing with regard to Sybil ; and Wilfrid was as yet ignorant of the fact that Mr. Throckmorton was on such intimate terms with the father of the young lady who, as Reginald confided to him, had 'caused him the greatest sorrow he had yet had in life.' Each, therefore, being unaware of the other's knowledge, was silent on the subject of the news they respectively received from India, and indeed they had plenty of business of their own to occupy them without troubling their heads about the love affairs of Reginald Oakburne and Sybil Beechcroft. In order to recount these it was necessary somewhat to anticipate the course of events, and the reader must now be requested to revert to the period, some four months earlier, when Theodore Hoffbauer was so suddenly prostrated by his attack of brain fever.

The latter's illness, poverty, and apparently friendless condition, drew forth a good deal of sympathy from his

fellow lodgers. Mr. Throckmorton, as Wilfrid subsequently learned from Dr. Block, insisted on paying the latter's bill, and the four men united their means to procure him a nurse, and furnish him with such little comforts as would further his recovery.

About ten days, however, after Mr. Karl, as he was still known to the inhabitants of No. 9 Poulford Street, had disturbed the party assembled to listen to Beverley Chipps' reading, the calls of two visitors to enquire for him, made it evident that he was not so altogether without friends as was supposed. The first was a lady, who came in the morning when all the other inmates of the house were away on their various avocations. 'A tall stylish person she was, sir,' said Mrs. Hollis, recounting the fact to Wilfrid and Beverley Chipps. 'Quite the lady with a real good silk gown, sir. Gave the name of. Lejoo, Madam Lejoo; and left this card to be given to Mr. Karl. She wanted to see him, sir, but I told her of course she could'n't do that yet, and then she said she would call again. A furineer she seemed to be, I think, Mr. Oakburne, sir.' The latter examining the card saw that it bore the name of Madam Ledru, and that some lines in German were written on the back of it, and suggested that the lady might be a sister of Mr. Karl's who had married some Frenchman. Beverley Chipps, however, laughed the idea to scorn, saying that a sister would have turned up earlier if she existed, and would probably have written to him. No! it could'n't be a sister! and the two had an argument on the point, which was set at rest by the arrival of Norton, who immediately identified the mysterious visitor with the wife of the proprietor of the Café Frankfurt, and reminded Wilfrid how

they had seen her in company with Mr. Karl at the 'Momus Theatre.'

Two days later, as Wilfrid and Norton were working together in their sitting-room, preparatory to attending an evening lecture at the Hospital, a hansom drove up to the door, and they heard Mrs. Hollis engaged in a conversation with a man who had alighted from it.

'Perhaps you'd like to see Mr. Oakburne or Mr. Norton, sir,' they heard the landlady say, and presently Walter Chessington was ushered into the room.

'I must apologise for troubling you,' said he, 'but I want to ask you to give me some information about a Mr. Karl, a teacher of German, who is lodging here. The landlady tells me you have been so kind as to look after him during his illness.'

Norton, always glad of an excuse to talk about anything, hastened to give him in reply a full account, with as much medical detail as he could conveniently introduce, of the German's illness, dwelling a good deal on his poverty and his suffering through want of proper food.

Chessington heard him patiently to the end, and then explained how Hoffbauer had called on him, that he had afterwards written to him, and receiving no answer had now come to try and ascertain the reason. 'I take a great interest in him,' said he, 'for he rendered me a signal service once, in fact he saved my life in a street riot at Frankfurt some years ago. I want to assist him if I can.'

'It will be some time before he is strong enough to do anything,' said Wilfrid.

'Ah yes! so I suppose,' replied Chessington. 'I am going out of town for a time now. When I return I

shall hope to come and see him. Meantime I shall esteem it a great favour if one of you gentlemen could let me know if any change for the worse sets in, and also if you would tell me when he is strong enough to get about.'

'I shall be very happy to do so,' said Wilfrid, 'if you will let me have your address.'

'I shall be much obliged to you,' answered the other, giving him a card. 'I can't help thinking,' added he, 'that we have met before, though I can't recollect where. Your name I think is—'

'Oakburne,' answered Wilfrid. 'Yes. I had the pleasure of seeing you at Otterstone once,' and he recalled to Chessington how his brother Reginald and he had explored the park under the guidance of Mr. Bowersby.

'To be sure!' cried Walter, 'I remember now perfectly! Odd we should meet again in this way! Well, I shall try and call again when I get back from the country; and you'll let me know, won't you, if anything happens.' He then took his departure, and Wilfrid explained to Norton how the Chessingtons now owned the property that had once belonged to his, Oakburne's, ancestors, and that that was why he and his brother had gone to visit it—information which rather raised him in his friend's estimation, whose family was not of any very great antiquity.

So one day succeeded another in a pleasant routine, which left nothing to distinguish them by, and the invalid passed the crisis of his illness, and slowly gained strength till the approach of Christmas dispersed Mrs. Hollis' other lodgers. Mr. Throckmorton took his departure for Yorkshire, and Beverley Chipps, rejoicing in the fruits of the

new Christmas story, hurried off to Essex, where his father had a living. Wilfrid had persuaded Norton, whose nearest relative was a stepmother with a family of her own to care for, to accompany him to Lidfield. He had taken a great liking to him, and Norton for his part was delighted with the idea of passing ten days in the country, instead of at the maternal residence at Twickenhouse, where his presence was not particularly looked forward to. So on the receipt from his sister of what struck Wilfrid as rather a cold acquiescence in his proposal, the pair set off in good spirits for Oakburne's home.

The Christmas of 1853 was what it is customary to term "seasonable" and "old fashioned," there being an abundance of frost, and snow, and fog, which increased the distress among the poor caused by the high prices of food consequent on bad harvests, both in France and Germany, as well as in England. It was a Christmas that was pervaded, moreover, by a spirit of excitement quite out of harmony with the season, for the minds of all men were full of the possibilities of war which the coming year was to convert into certainties. Lord Palmerston had tendered his resignation at the beginning of the month, and though it was afterwards withdrawn, it had created a ministerial crisis. The English people, among the majority of whom a warlike impulse to espouse the cause of the Turks had long been gaining strength, chose to attribute this step on the part of that minister to his disapproval of the hesitation of the government, and began to regard him as the representative of the popular policy ; and anticipations of the coming struggle had begun to produce in the minds of very many a restlessness which communicated itself even to those who were unaware of its cause.

There was an unusual amount of gaiety at Lidfield this year. People who had never before given parties now took to giving them. A huge Christmas tree was set up in the Town Hall for the benefit of the distressed poor to whom the handsome sum thus collected was distributed in the form of bread, coal, and flannel. An amateur dramatic performance was organised for the same purpose and was so successful that it was found necessary to have another for the Hospital which was discovered to be in want of funds. Besides this, Sir Joseph Boresby was now really known to be dying, and both his nephew Ferdinand Boresby in the Conservative, and Walter Chessington in the Liberal interest, were actively canvassing the borough, and the leading members of both parties did their best from motives of policy to promote all forms of hospitality and sociability in the town. Hence, what with skating and shooting, dancing and taking part in private theatricals, Norton found his time during his stay at his friends pass very pleasantly. He won the heart of Mrs Oakburne by his attentive politeness and deference to her opinions ; flirted quietly but persistently with Ethel, to their mutual satisfaction and Wilfrid's amusement ; threw himself heartily into whatever was going on, and in short thoroughly enjoyed himself. Wilfrid, however, who ought to have done so equally, found his stay at home becoming gradually more and more disagreeable. This certainly did not arise from any disposition in himself for he had come down fully prepared to make the most of his holiday, and the companionship of the volatile Norton was as good a stimulant to cheerfulness as he could well have found ; nor was it, as the reader perhaps may imagine, because he saw but little of Miss Elkfield, or at least never saw her alone. Though this might at other times have made him

gloomy, his time was now so fully occupied that he had little leisure to dwell on it. His unhappiness arose from neither of these causes, but was produced by an almost indescribable atmosphere of unexpressed dislike and suspicion which he noticed in the manner of all his acquaintance since his return to Lidfield. At first he endeavoured to pay no attention to these unpleasant feelings, and to ascribe them to some morbid trick of his imagination, but as time went on he found that his sensitiveness was not to blame on this occasion.

To begin with, his mother and sister had greeted him in a way which seemed to imply secret displeasure and reproach, and though at first he took no notice of this, he observed that they assumed this manner whenever they addressed him, and that his not very frequent sallies of fun and good humour which used to please now seemed to shock them. Norton's presence, however, served to a certain extent to make him feel the effects of their bearing towards him less keenly than he would otherwise have done, and also prevented him from asking the explanation which he was often on the point of demanding. So far indeed as Ethel and his mother were concerned he was half inclined to attribute the feeling shewn towards him to the fact that he had brought his friend to them at very short notice, but he was not slow to observe that it was not confined to them, and to detect the same unpleasant elements in the manners of most of his acquaintance in the place. Young men and women with whom he had been accustomed to be on friendly terms saluted him with unmistakable coolness and confined their conversation to the barest and briefest common places. He fancied that even the tradespeople looked at him askance, and once or twice noticed that his arrival in a room or shop was the signal for a whisper

followed by disapproving glances. He began to feel convinced that it was no mere fancy, and that there must be some unknown charge against him, which was making him generally unpopular. One of the things that pained him most was the evident displeasure of the rector whom he had always liked, and who had ever been accustomed to take a kindly notice of him. Now he and his wife and daughters either avoided him altogether or gave him the very curtest of greetings. In short the general disapproval with which he was regarded, was so manifest that he began to feel very unhappy and indignant. If he was accused of anything, why was he not told plainly what it was? But he was quite unable to solve the mystery till one morning as he was walking down the High Street he saw Mr. Simcox coming towards him. He was hurrying up to greet the schoolmaster warmly when he was shocked to see the latter, with a marked look of pain and dislike on his gentle, good-tempered face, cross over to the other side to avoid him, and altogether ignore his nod of recognition. When he had recovered from his surprise and anger at this behaviour, he suddenly remembered how he had lately seen Lois at the theatre, and his conscience reproached him for not having tried to find her out. He resolved that he would go and see Mr. Simcox as soon as he could, both to try and find out the meaning of his conduct, and also to procure news of his daughter. He was going with Ethel and Norton that afternoon to skate on some flooded meadow-land, about a mile and a half out of the town, to which everybody resorted in the hard weather. He would slip away early he thought, and go and have a talk with the schoolmaster.

After a hurried luncheon the trio set out for Black-acre, as the skating ground was called, Norton beguiling

the way by his usual flow of chaff and nonsense which, though it amused Miss Oakburne, was scarcely heeded by her brother, who was silent and pre-occupied. In his present frame of mind, Wilfrid was getting rather impatient with his friend's cheerfulness and loquacity, and almost longed for his departure, which was to take place in a couple of days, that he might have a full explanation with his mother. The ice, however, presented such an animated appearance, that it for a moment made him forget his gloomy thoughts. All the good people of Lidfield and its neighbourhood were there, apparently enjoying themselves thoroughly. Skaters skimmed hither and thither, or wobbled clumsily along, according to their degrees of skill. Here a master of the art was cutting graceful figures in a swept rink before an admiring circle of spectators; there a noisy party of boys and men were playing at hockey. Shouts, laughter, the ringing, cracking, and groaning of the ice, and the barking of dogs filled the air; while around the edge of the frozen water a goodly show of carriages was interspersed, with the more humble throng of spectators, the putters on of skates, the owners of chairs, and the vendors of hot coffee and chesnuts.

After having fastened on his sister's skates—for Ethel was one of the adventurous few of her sex who in those days aspired to learn the art—Wilfrid handed her over to the guidance of his friend and prepared to take his way alone over the ice. As he left the shore, however, he caught sight of Mr. and Mrs. Elkfield seated in their carriage, by which a gentleman was standing. The latter was talking earnestly to Mr. Elkfield, and Wilfrid quickly recognised him as Giles Rowancourt, who with his nephew had arrived the day before at his old quarters at Lady Thistledale's in order to resume the business of

canvassing. The two men took no notice of him, but Mrs. Elkfield gave him a kindly bow which sent the blood rushing to the young fellow's face, for it seemed the first cordial greeting he had had since his return home. He moved rapidly away to cover his confusion, and in doing so nearly ran into a sledge chair, propelled by a fair handsome young man, in which a lady was seated. It was Beatrice Elkfield, and the man with her was Walter Chessington. She honoured him with a cold stare, and returned his bow with a frigid little nod which rekindled all the angry feelings in his breast ; but Chessington saluted him with a rather surprised but very friendly 'Hullo ! How are you ?' as the pair went scudding on their way. Wilfrid was a very tolerable skater, and his suppleness and length of limb made him a proficient in the art of cutting figures, but his presence of mind was so upset by this unexpected meeting that he stumbled and very nearly came on his face to the great amusement of two little urchins engaged in sweeping away the snow. 'Ee beant good for much,' remarked the one to his fellow, who concurring with a grin of derision, immediately ran up and begged Wilfrid for a copper. His ill-temper was not improved by his mishap, and, flinging the lad a penny, with a savage curse that thoroughly frightened him, he went spinning along, not much caring where he went. Such of his acquaintance as he met he saluted with a fierce abruptness that made them stare. After all, if people were rude to him why should he not repay them in their own coin. So he skated on, full of suppressed anger and indignation, and regardless of the shortening day, till he suddenly ran full against a man who was skating towards him, and who, like himself, was too engrossed to notice where he was going. The shock was so

violent that both of them were nearly upset, and each breathlessly begged the other's pardon.

'Hallo! Portal!' cried Wilfrid, recognising the solicitor, 'I'm very sorry!' He had not seen him since his return, for Portal had been very busy about electioneering business.

'Oh its you, Oakburne!' said the other. 'Such accidents will happen, I suppose. Good afternoon,' and he turned to go. His manner was studiously, almost offensively cold, and nettled the already angry Wilfrid beyond endurance. Here was a chance thought he, to have it out with some one. He had never liked Portal much, so if it ended in unpleasantness, all the better. He would *make* him talk to him. He would not submit to be cut by Portal.

'Oh! by the way!' cried he, stopping him. 'I want to speak to you.'

'What is it?' said Portal, looking at his watch, 'I'm rather busy to-day.'

'And that's why your skating, eh?' said Oakburne, sarcastically.

'Exercise,' replied Portal, a little confused, 'one must have a little fresh air, you know.'

'You're very busy about this election; looking after voters, aint you?' went on Wilfrid, throwing the slightest possible dash of contempt into his tones and leisurely lighting his pipe. 'You're going to give us a new member I hear.'

'I don't know what you mean by *giving* you a new member. Our client, Walter Chessington, of Otterstone Hall, is going to come forward—a very good candidate he'll make too. I'm hard at work. Cold, isn't it?' and he tried to move onwards again.

'Stop a moment!' said Wilfrid, determined to con-

tinue the conversation. 'I wanted to ask you about,—about the Simcoxes, you know. Can you tell me how they are going on? I've been away some time, and I take an interest in them, as I think you are aware.' He could not think of anything else to say, but that would do as well as any other subject, though it struck him directly after that it was a queer question to ask Portal.

The latter gave a sudden start, and changed colour; then he faced round and looked at him with a disagreeably astonished stare. 'Well! Upon my word, Oakburne,' said he, 'I wonder you have the face to ask me!'

'What the devil do you mean, sir?' cried Wilfrid so fiercely, that the other turned still paler, and gave a frightened glance at his tall questioner, who during the last year had filled out considerably, and, with anger in his eyes, presented a somewhat formidable appearance.

'Don't be so fierce, my good fellow,' stammered Portal. 'Of course there's really nothing in it. I think none the worse of you, I assure you. Though the thing had a bad appearance here you know, on account of their being so well known.'

The two were quite alone in a far corner of the big piece of water which was more than a mile in length. The brief winter day was drawing to a close, and as the light began to fade such skaters as remained kept to the end where the carriages and chairs were, and the murmur of far off sounds, and the dim figures in the distance increased the feeling of solitude.

'Look here, Portal,' said Wilfrid sternly, going close up to him, and looking him full in the face, 'I insist on your explaining to me instantly what you mean by that, or by Heaven you will regret it.'

‘All right, my good sir! you needn’t look so infernally as if you were going to kill one,’ said Portal, very nervously. ‘Surely you know I allude to the Simcox business . . . I say its so cursedly cold here, standing about, that I think I’ll just take a drain—won’t you have some?’ and with a tremulous hand he drew a brandy flask from his pocket, and put it to his lips.

‘I don’t want any of your brandy,’ cried Wilfrid savagely, waving away the proffered glass. ‘Speak out man, and say clearly what you mean! How should I ‘surely know that you allude to the Simcox business.’ Tell me at once please, for I’m getting a little impatient,’ and he laid a heavy hand on the other’s shoulder, and looked still more unpleasant.

‘You won’t gain anything by bullying, sir!’ quavered Portal, striving in vain to be calm. ‘I have done you no injury, surely, my dear Oakburne,’ added he, in a whining voice.

‘Then speak out in God’s name!’ cried the other.

Portal paused for a moment, with eyes bent on the ground. ‘Surely you know,’ he said at length, speaking very slowly, and with a little ring of triumph in his tones, ‘surely you know that Lois Simcox had a child about four months after you left; and that she and the baby disappeared suddenly; and that you are said to be the father of that child.’

‘My God! What an infernal lie!’ cried poor Wilfrid. His hand dropped from Portal’s shoulder, he leaned for a moment against the gate of the field close to them.

That he, with his strong loathing of the crime imputed to him, conscious of feeling the strongest sympathy and respect for the man whose daughter he was believed to have ruined, as well as a deep pity, and a liking almost amounting to attachment for the girl herself, should not

only be thus held up for public reproach, but have his character blackened in the eyes of his own mother and sister, filled his heart with an indignant grief, the bitterness of which he could never forget. Many a time in after years the whole scene would rise vividly before him; the wide deserted expanse of ice, the leafless hedges with the snow covered fields beyond, the bright sunset tints in the far horizon, and in the foreground. Portal, confronting him with a look of triumph in his dark eyes, and an evil half smile on his pale keen features.

‘I am very glad to hear you say so,’ said the latter, reassured by the effect of his words, ‘though I fear you’ll find it hard enough to prove your case now. You must admit that appearances are against you.’

This second shot was well aimed, and Wilfrid groaned in the bitterness of his heart, as he felt that it was true that by his foolish attentions to Lois he had given cause for the report against him.

‘It was imprudent of you,’ went on Portal, enjoying the wounds he was inflicting on the spirit of the man who dared to bully him, ‘it was imprudent—though of course you meant no harm—to walk with her as you did. These things so soon get known.’

‘If I could only find the scoundrel who first circulated this diabolical calumny, by Heaven, I would half kill him!’ cried Oakburne, stung to fury by the thought of his hopeless position.

‘No, no!—That is, of course you would almost have a right to!’ said Portal, drawing away a little, and getting a little paler. ‘But my dear fellow, surely you make too much of this! Such things happen every day. Many men would be rather proud of the affair. Its just what many men, and women too, admire. Of course the fact

of her being the daughter of a man so well known in the place as Simcox, makes it seem a little cruel and hard at first, but that will wear off in time.'

'Stop this, Portal!' cried Wilfrid with an oath, and a look of fierce disgust. 'To me the man who does such things is utterly loathsome; and so is the man who admires them.'

His look and tones silenced Portal for a moment. 'I really must be going now,' he said at last. 'Of course you can try and disprove the thing,' added he, with a sneer, 'I hope you may; but you'll find it very difficult.'

'Stay, Portal! I am going too. I've heard enough. Tell me one thing, though,' and he seized his arm, and looked him keenly in the face. 'Tell me, on your word of honour, does Lois herself say that I am the father of her child?'

'I—I really can't say,' stammered Portal, faltering before his steady gaze. 'I—I don't know that she did, certainly. Its not impossible that she may have done so—in fact its almost probable. But,—but I wont—I really can't say one way or the other.'

'That will do,' said Oakburne, and they skated back in silence to the bank, which was now almost deserted.


'Rely on my contradicting this story, whenever I can, my dear Oakburne,' said Portal, grasping his hand with great fervour. Wilfrid, though he somehow distrusted him more than ever, felt bound to thank him, and the other espying another acquaintance who was just leaving, hurried off to greet him. Ethel and Norton had long since given up waiting for him, so Wilfrid took his way back to Lidfield and, as soon as he reached the town, bent his steps to the schoolmaster's cottage.

CHAPTER XV.

The Consequences.

In such a world, so thorny, and where none
Finds happiness unblighted, or, if found,
Without some thistly sorrow at its side ;
It seems the part of wisdom, and no sin
Against the law of love, to measure lots
With less distinguish'd than ourselves ; that thus
We may with patience bear our moderate ills,
And sympathize with others suffering more.

COWPER.

 HE more he thought over the matter the more gloomy did things appear to Wilfrid Oakburne. Appearances were certainly against him in every way. It was natural that every one should believe him guilty, when such a very plausible slander against him had once found acceptance with his friends and acquaintances ; but who could have been base enough to start the story ? He could think of no one likely to do so save Portal, and he reflected that it would be quite contrary to the cautious nature of the latter to circulate a rumour which, as far as he could see, could not benefit him in the smallest degree. He dismissed the idea as quite unreasonable. The more he thought of it the more he felt that Lois was the only person who could help him to prove his innocence. It was true that her attempt to drown herself ought to be pretty clear evidence of her having fallen long before he became intimate with her, but he was the only person who knew of her attempted

suicide, and for her own sake and her father's he felt loth to make it known, even to justify himself. It was very hard! His mother and sister, how disgusted and shocked must they not have felt! And Beatrice too! how she must loathe and despise him! He knew that she took a special interest in Lois, who was much of her own age, and whom she had known from a child. No wonder she was cold to him! How could he ever face her again! And yet Mrs. Elkfield had plainly showed that she at all events still felt kindly towards him. The whole subject was full of perplexities and contradictions; but one thing he was resolved on. He would return to London and try and find out Lois if possible. He would leave the place as soon as he could after Norton's departure, but before going he would have an explanation with his mother and sister. Full of these thoughts he entered the little wicket gate, at which he had last parted with Lois and knocked at Mr. Simcox's door, and presently the schoolmaster, holding a lamp in his hand, stood before him on the threshold.

'Mr. Simcox' said Wilfrid eagerly, 'can I speak to you on a matter of great importance.'

'What do you want with me?' cried the other in a voice tremulous with the anger plainly written in his face. 'How dare you come here—to my house—to the home you have ruined? Do you wish to add insult to the curse you have brought on me and mine? Begone, Mr. Oakburne! you call yourself a gentleman—it is true that by birth you have the right—and I am a poor man, not a gentleman, not of your caste, but I tell you that sooner than be such as you, I would pass my days in the lowest misery and squallor! Sooner than soil myself with the touch of your hands I would eat the refuse in the streets! Begone, I say! I am old now

but—' and the passion with which he trembled, choked his utterance.

'For Heaven's sake hear me!' cried poor Wilfrid.

'Heaven! who are you to dare to talk of Heaven! You! who have driven my Lois, my only child to perdition! Why did you not leave her to drown? why did you save her life to ruin her—to blast my life?'

'Stay Mr. Simcox!' said Wilfrid fiercely. 'Cease this abuse for a moment. I can make due allowance for your feelings; but more than a certain amount of calumny I will not submit to hear. Listen! you are accusing me falsely. You are heaping your anger and malice on an innocent man. I tell you,' cried he drawing himself up proudly, 'I tell you that as truly as there is a God above us who hears and judges all that we are saying now, I am innocent with regard to your daughter.'

'You! Innocent!' cried the schoolmaster with a stare, half of amazement, half of incredulity.

'Yes! innocent!' repeated Wilfrid; 'as innocent as you are yourself. What proof have you of my guilt? Lies, accursed lies, have been told of me in order to saddle me with the crime of another. I swear to you I am innocent of poor Lois' ruin. Heaven knows how I feel for your sorrow! But do you suppose I have suffered nothing? Do you forget my shame, at this false accusation? Why, my own mother and sister believe me guilty!'

'Come! come!' cried the schoolmaster, touched in spite of himself, 'I would accuse no man falsely, God knows! I speak but what I have heard from everyone. You say you are innocent. God grant it may be so. But the charges I have heard brought against you are very serious, Wilfrid Oakburne! Still I will not be unjust or condemn you unheard. Come into my room for a minute that we may speak more freely,' and he led the

way into the little parlour in which Wilfrid had had his first interview with Lois after he had saved her life.

‘I have been told,’ he began, placing himself full in front of Wilfrid, and looking at him fixedly, ‘that you walked constantly with my daughter by the river, and that you came here to see her while I was absent at my work at the school. Is that true?’

‘It is true,’ said Wilfrid, steadily.

‘You admit it then?’ cried the other, with anger re-kindling in his eyes. ‘You admit it! Was that the conduct of an honourable man, of a gentleman—’

‘Stop, Mr. Simcox. I do not deny it, nor,’ added he proudly, ‘am I ashamed of it. You know what first led me to become intimate with your daughter. It was that I saved her from death. I learnt then to feel an esteem and sympathy for her which I still feel—for I will never believe that she had anything to do with this slander. I own that I was foolish and wrong to give occasion for scandal, and deeply is my folly punished. But I swear to you again on this Holy Book,’ and he took a Bible that lay on a bookcase close to them and, placing it on the table, laid his hand upon it, ‘I swear to you most solemnly on this sacred book, that no guilty intercourse, no act of which an honest man would be ashamed, ever passed between Lois and me,’ and he looked with unflinching eyes into the pale face of the schoolmaster, who had never for a moment removed his steady gaze from him.

‘You swear this?’ asked he with deep earnestness. ‘Remember how deep an injury has been done me—an injury which none but a father can realise, one which has robbed my life of happiness and will cover my lonely old age with shame and unceasing grief. Remember this, I say, and in God’s name do not deceive me!’

Wilfrid restrained with an effort the momentary anger which the doubt of his word kindled in him, and repeated solemnly, 'I swear that I am innocent, so help me God!'

For an instant he was tempted to support his declaration by telling her father how Lois had attempted self-destruction, but he generously forbore to pain him further by this fresh disclosure. He was glad that he had refrained from doing so when Mr. Simcox, after a long pause, during which he had studied Wilfrid's face as though he would read his very soul, said, 'I believe you. Forgive me if I have wronged you.'

'God bless you,' cried Wilfrid, eagerly, extending his hand. 'God bless you! you have taken a heavy load from my heart!' The other grasped it in silence, and motioned Wilfrid to take a seat.

'And now,' said the latter, 'I must ask you to tell me how it was that you first came to hear these charges against me. I cannot believe that Lois told you. Tell me! Remember that I am as anxious as you are to find out the truth in this matter.'

'No, no!' cried the other, shaking his head. 'No! It was not she who told me! She left me without a word or even a hint. She merely wrote a few lines telling me the story of her shame, and that she would not stay to disgrace me. No, no! It was not Lois! Ah! poor darling! if you could tell how I have loved her, Mr. Oakburne! She was my all; I lived for her! Now, even now, I would forgive her everything! She never could have fallen had not some arch devil tempted her! She was so good! so pure! Lois! Lois! my child, my child!' and he covered his face with his hands, and wept aloud.

'You are right, Mr. Simcox,' said Wilfrid, deeply

moved, and forgetting the question of his own justification in the sight of the poor father's anguish. 'You are right. Some arch demon it must have been who could betray one so simple and good as Lois. But do not despair. I have seen her in London. We shall find her yet.'

'Seen her!' cried the other, starting to his feet. 'You have seen her, and did not tell me where she is! Tell me at once, sir, I conjure you; and I will go to her immediately.'

'Stay! be calm for a little, and I will explain all to you,' replied Oakburne, and then he told him how he had recognised Lois at the theatre, of his alarm and surprise, and how he had hitherto been prevented from carrying out his intention of visiting her.

The father listened with breathless eagerness, and it was only by the strongest remonstrances that he could be hindered from going off at once to London in search of his daughter. She had, it appeared, left home on the pretext of paying a visit to an aunt who lived in the neighbouring parish of Rollhill, and had posted the letter in which she revealed her true purpose at a station intermediate between Lidfield and London. Then little by little the news had become public gossip, and—he knew not how or by whom—it had been at first vaguely rumoured, and then stated with certainty, that Wilfrid was the seducer. His walks and his visits to the house were reported as conclusive evidence against him, till, as has been shown, his guilt had been assumed as a fact. Nothing more had been heard of Lois, and in spite of all his efforts, her father could get not the slightest clue to her movements. Had he done so, he said, he would at once have given up his work and gone to seek her; but all information as to her whereabouts was so

absolutely wanting that he had felt it would be hopeless. He had clung to his school work as a consolation in his deep sorrow, hoping always that she might return or write to him. Now that he had heard, why should he not go at once? It was his duty. He would see the rector, who had been a most kind friend all through, and would start immediately.

Wilfrid however after a good deal of difficulty managed to dissuade him from this course, pointing out the great uncertainty of finding Lois, who would of course be acting under an assumed name at the theatre where he had seen her, and that it was to be feared that if she got any clue to his intentions she would immediately try and conceal herself from him. It was most probable too that, as the piece in which she had been performing had been withdrawn to make room for another more suitable to the Christmas season and she had filled such a very minor part in it, she had gone to seek a livelihood elsewhere. After some difficulty he at length succeeded in convincing Mr. Simcox that it would be wisest to wait till he, Wilfrid, could communicate with him on the subject. He was going to London in two days time and would at once commence his search for her, and he added that he thought he had friends who could materially aid him in it. He advised him to take counsel with the rector on the subject, telling him all that had passed between them. 'I do not expect him at once to believe in my innocence,' added he, 'nor shall I consider it at all satisfactorily proved to you or to any other person till it has been declared by Lois with her own lips. This will be one great inducement to me, apart from my esteem for and desire to serve both you and her, to spare no trouble in seeking her, and you may rest assured that I shall leave no stone unturned till I succeed in finding her.' Then

with renewed protestations of good will on both sides, he took his leave.

As it was Norton's last evening with them, Wilfrid would have liked to have been in a better humour for making it pass as pleasantly as possible. To begin with however he was late for dinner, a thing which Mrs. Oakburne regarded as one of the minor sins, and the good lady's displeasure at this, combined with the unexplained misunderstanding between her and her son, cast an atmosphere of 'wet blanket' over the party. Then, too, though he tried his best to be lively and talkative, the news he had just received was not calculated to raise his spirits. Mrs. Oakburne attributed his occasional fits of gloom and abstraction to remorse, and Norton, from professional habit of thought, set them down to a disordered liver. The next morning the latter started for London as full of regret to leave the quarters he had found so pleasant, as Mrs. Oakburne and her daughter were to lose his cheerful companionship, for, to tell the truth, his presence had been most welcome in the unhappy state of feeling between Wilfrid and his mother and sister. When Oakburne accompanied his friend to the station the latter, on parting, expressed a hope that he might find him in a more cheerful frame of mind when they met again in Poulford Street, and Wilfrid mentally resolved that he would follow him thither directly he had had an explanation with his mother and sister.

Full of this purpose he slowly climbed the long ascent from the station to the town, and so intent was he with his own thoughts that he hardly noticed till he got level with it a carriage drawn by a couple of ponies which had been preceding him. Then as he turned to glance at its occupants he saw that they were Mrs. Elkfield and her daughter, who had also driven in to see the last of a

departing guest. The elder lady greeted him kindly, and rebuked him for not having been to see them oftener.

‘You have quite cut us, Mr. Oakburne’ said she. ‘Hasn’t he Beatrice?’

Her daughter, who looked as calm and impassive as the well drilled groom seated behind them, coldly assented.

Wilfrid pleaded that they had had a friend staying with them, and that he had been unable to leave him. ‘I meant to call on you, Mrs. Elkfield, I assure you,’ said he, ‘but I am leaving myself to-morrow.’

‘Are you really!’ said Beatrice quickly, giving the ponies a sharp flick with the whip, ‘I suppose you find Lidfield insupportably dull after London.’

‘It is not that,’ said Wilfrid drily. It was clear that Beatrice evidently did not share her mother’s good opinion of him. ‘It is not that, Miss Elkfield, but I have to be getting back to my work.’

‘Oh! of course,’ replied the young lady with a little toss of scornful incredulity.

‘Have you heard that poor Sir Joseph Boarsby died last night? Very sad, isn’t it?’ said Mrs. Elkfield.

‘Very sad!’ answered Wilfrid. ‘Then I suppose we shall have another election,’ added he after a pause.

‘Yes. There will of course be nothing done till after the funeral; but then I suppose all that noisy electioneering business will begin. Mr. Chessington is coming forward on our side you know, and Mr. Elkfield is going to give him his support. You are a Liberal, of course.’

Wilfrid replied that he was.

‘That’s right, Wilfrid,’ said the good-natured lady. ‘Mr. Chessington seems a very nice young man. But I do

hate all the worry, and crowds, and confusion of an election ! I suppose it will all be set right in time though.'

'Yes! one day I hope everything will be set right,' and Wilfrid, full of his own troubles, sighed rather wearily.

'What a melancholy man !' cried Mrs. Elkfield with a laugh. 'Well, there are certainly a good many things that want setting right in the world ; and it is a comfort to think that some day they will be.'

'Yes, I hope so,' said Wilfrid. 'I must wish you goodbye now.' They had reached the summit of the hill, and the town lay below them.

'Goodbye, Miss Elkfield.'

'Wilfrid, if you are not going till to-morrow, won't you come and see us this afternoon,' said the wayward young lady, suddenly becoming very kind in her manner. 'I hope with you that all will come right one day.'

He warmly grasped the hand she extended to him, with an eager look at the face he loved so well, and Miss Elkfield whipped up her ponies and the carriage rolled swiftly down the hill.

'Take care where you are driving to my dear,' said her mother. 'Don't be too hard on the ponies. They have had very hard work lately.'

Miss Elkfield had some excuse for venting her feelings on those unoffending cattle for she had been lately a good deal troubled by the rumours which had not failed to reach her about Wilfrid. It happened that she had, as has been mentioned, known Lois Simcox since childhood, and always taken a great interest in the poor girl, and the news had thus been doubly painful to her. It seemed so sadly probable and yet it was so hard to believe this charge against her lover, that she had experienced much secret distress in consequence.

‘I hope Wilfrid will come this afternoon,’ said her mother. ‘I always have liked him, and thought him a very worthy young fellow, and we have seen so little of him of late.’

Beatrice gave her a grateful look. ‘I hope he will mamma,’ said she. ‘He looked very ill and out of spirits poor fellow ! Didn’t you think so ?’

Mrs. Elkfield assented, and then happening to remember that Mr. Rowancourt and his nephew were coming to dinner that evening, she changed the conversation to the latter’s chances of success at the coming election.

Oakburne followed the rapidly receding pony carriage, feeling happier than he had done since his return to Lidfield. Evidently Beatrice only half believed the calumnies which he knew she must have heard against him, and which would now account for much of her apparent coldness of manner. She had called him Wilfrid again, and had asked him to go and see them ; yes he certainly would go there that afternoon. He hurried home to luncheon in good spirits and told his mother and sister the news of Sir Joseph Boarsby’s death.

‘We have already been informed of it,’ said Mrs. Oakburne coldly.

‘You saw Mr. Norton off?’ asked Ethel.

‘Yes, I saw Norton off,’ replied Wilfrid. ‘Its a pity he could not have stayed another day, and then we could have gone back together.’

‘Yes—We shall miss him certainly. He’s so bright and amusing,’ said his sister. ‘But what do you mean by travelling together?’

‘I am going back myself to-morrow.’

‘To-morrow, Wilfrid ! You have not given us much

of your company !' said his mother, in a tone of aggrieved surprise, and an unpleasant silence followed.

'Must you really go to-morrow, Wilfrid?' Ethel said, at last.

'It is perhaps better that your brother should go, Ethel, as he desires to do so.' Mrs. Oakburne spoke in her coldest and most measured manner.

'Yes!' answered Wilfrid, hotly, 'it is better your brother should go, since his family treat him as they have done the last few weeks.'

'You have only yourself to thank, sir, for your treatment,' said his mother sternly. 'When we are led to believe that you are guilty of conduct which no christian can tolerate—conduct' added she, with a tremor in her voice, 'which I never dreamed a son of mine could lower himself to pursue. It is natural that your sister and I should show our indignation and disgust, when you are unable to disown the charge brought against you of such a wanton cruel act as you know you are accused of.'

'Oh mamma!' cried Ethel, 'you are too hard on him.'

'Silence, Ethel,' said her mother, 'I must say what I feel and think right.' Both her pride and her religious feeling had been deeply wounded by her son's supposed misconduct. 'I feel it my duty to do so,' added she.

All the resentment and indignation which had been gradually gathering in Wilfrid's heart, burst forth at this unlucky speech of Mrs. Oakburne's. 'So madam,' cried he, 'you have been content to judge your son unheard ! Pretty conduct in one who professes such affection and so much christianity ! I have long wished to ask an explanation of your manner, since I only learnt yesterday the charge that has been brought against me. But as

you choose to swallow, without question, all the lies that have been told of me, I shall not condescend to do so. It was well that I arranged to go to-morrow, and I no longer repent it. Nay! I feel it is putting off my going too late. I will stop no longer under your roof. I will go to-night,' and full of anger he left the room.

'Stay, Wilfrid!' cried his mother. 'Do not say unheard, I——,' but he took no heed of her words, and, going up to his room locked his door, and began packing his trunks. After a while he heard a gentle tap at his door, and his sister's voice imploring him to speak to her. But his fierce temper quite mastered him. He savagely bade her begone, with an imprecation that fairly frightened the poor girl, and went on with his preparations for departure. His mother's and sister's conduct had been intolerable! To judge him unheard! to decide on his guilt without asking one word of explanation! It was monstrous! What could he expect from others if his own family treated him thus! He felt that he did not care to see them before leaving. What should he do till the time for leaving came? His train did not start till between nine and ten; he would just have time he thought to go and see the Elkfields. They had not formed such a cruel judgment of him at all events. He brightened at the thought, and determined to set out at once. As he was about to descend the stair his mother darted from her room which was opposite to his.

'My dear boy!' she cried. 'Forgive me if I have been hasty!' The poor woman had been waiting for the last hour, for the chance of speaking to him.

'No!' thundered Wilfrid, his wrath boiling up again. 'I cannot forgive such injustice! It is enough to be slandered by others, without looking for it from you!'

and he would have passed on had not Ethel run to him and seized his arm.

‘Oh Wilfrid!’ cried she, ‘do not be so wicked and cruel! Why did you not listen. Oh, its my fault!’ and she burst out crying.

‘Wilfrid!’ interrupted his mother, scarcely heeding her, ‘at least condescend to listen! It is false to say I judged you unheard. In the midst of my grief, after the Rector had been here to talk to me, and made me feel more miserable than I ever felt in my life, I wrote to you immediately, as tenderly and gently as I could, and implored you to contradict this at once—this dreadful report. Why did you not do it? When your sister wrote afterwards, and begged you at my request to answer my letter, why did you make not the slightest allusion even to what I said, when you wrote to me? What were we to believe after all we have heard?—and you’ve never said a word, not one word since you have come back. If you knew what I have suffered—’ and here she fairly gave way and sobbed.

Wilfrid had been listening in amazement while she spoke, turning first to one and then to another. ‘Letter!’ said he, at last. ‘Not answer! What do you mean? I got no letter! I heard nothing of this infernal slander till Portal told me on the ice yesterday evening.’

‘Wilfrid! is it possible! Thank God! I knew you never could have been so—have done this! Thank God!’ and with a sudden change of feeling, Mrs. Oakburne threw her arms round her son’s neck, half-laughing and half-crying.

‘There’s been some mischief-making here,’ said Wilfrid at last, after he had returned his mother’s embrace, and asked her forgiveness for his anger.

‘Oh mother ! Its all my fault !’ cried Ethel, again giving way to tears. ‘Its all my wicked, stupid, carelessness ! Oh Wilfrid, do forgive me !’ and then, with much sobbing, she proceeded to say how when she had gone to her room, after having been repulsed from Wilfrid’s door, she had there espied her cloak hanging up ; how some mysterious impulse had made her suddenly look into the pockets, and that there she had discovered this very letter of her mother’s to Wilfrid which she had totally forgotten to post. Wilfrid, having never received it, had of course been at a loss to understand what his sister meant by imploring him to answer it, and hence his next letter to his mother had naturally led her to think that he had nothing to say in his defence.

‘Oh Ethel ! let that be a warning to you to be more careful in future,’ cried Mrs. Oakburne. ‘Oh what a weight is off my head !’ And there was more embracing on the part of the two ladies.

Harmony being thus fully restored between the trio, Wilfrid told them of his visit to Mr. Simcox, of his having seen Lois at the theatre, and of his intention to try and find her in London, all of which, as it may be supposed, greatly relieved and pleased poor Mrs. Oakburne and Ethel. They in their turn told how the Rector had called to try and ascertain whether through Wilfrid any clue could be got as to Lois’s whereabouts, and of how the miserable imputation on the young fellow had thus first reached them, and how wretched it had made them. As they sat thus, eagerly talking and explaining, the afternoon had slipped away when Wilfrid suddenly remembered that he had meant to go to the Elkfields. Was it not too late ? Well if it was, for once he would risk a breach of the *convenances*, and his mother and sister, guessing the cause of his

anxiety, bade him go. They had agreed that as he was bent on returning to town the next day, it was just as well he should start late that night as early next morning, so leaving them to make whatever further arrangements were necessary for his departure he hurried off to pay his visit.

But for the quarrel now so happily reconciled and the delay it had occasioned, Wilfrid would have had the opportunity of a *tete à tete* with Miss Elkfield, which would probably have materially altered the course of his life. Beatrice had stopped at home on purpose to see him. She was really fond of him, fonder than she knew, and the sight of his unhappy face and the dread that she had been judging him harshly and unjustly had filled her with a tender compunction that, had Wilfrid been there to plead his own cause, would have gone far to win him the prize he coveted so much. She waited patiently in the house, neglecting a rehearsal for some most exciting private theatricals in which she was to play a leading part, and anxiously did she listen for the knock and ring which should announce the arrival of the lover whom she had begun to reproach herself with having treated so badly. But it was not to be. The short afternoon changed to twilight, and still Wilfrid Oakburne never came. It was only when Beatrice had been obliged to give him up in despair and to go and adorn herself for the reception of Walter Chessington and his uncle, that the banging of the house door told her that the laggard had come too late. 'What a silly time to call!' was all Miss Elkfield remarked as she saw on the hall table the piece of pasteboard which Wilfrid had left in token of his visit, and she sang unusually well, and was remarkably lively and agreeable to their guests that evening.

'Everything is against me,' said poor Wilfrid, as he

turned from the door after delivering his card, and learnt that the ladies had gone to dress for dinner. 'Something tells me this was my last chance of winning Beatrice,' and he stood and took a last look at the house with its lights glimmering cheerfully through the murky air.

He had a very dismal journey that night. He could not sleep, and spent most of the time in brooding over his injuries and ill-fortune till the train at last glided into the terminus towards the dawn of a dull January morning. The porters and the cabmen were all half asleep, the deserted streets were slushy with half-melted snow, and the gas lamps were paling in the growing daylight. All was cold, desolate, and wretched, and on arriving at his lodgings, he found of course that he was not expected, and that Mrs. Hollis was consequently somewhat sulky at being roused to receive him. None of his fellow lodgers, she said, were likely to return for a week or ten days, though Mr. Karl was of course still there, 'a gettin' better slowly, Mr. Oakburne sir, but wants a deal of nursin' yet, the doctor says.' Wilfrid felt thoroughly tired and miserable, and, rejecting the landlady's offers of refreshment, was glad to turn into Norton's room, his own still being occupied by the German.

CHAPTER XVI.

*In which Mr. Karl receives important news from
Germany.*

Sauntering hither on listless wings,
Careless vagabond of the sea,
Little thou heedest the surf that sings,
The bar that thunders, the shale that rings,—
Give me to keep thy company.

Little thou hast, old friend, that's new,
Storms and wrecks are old things to thee ;
Sick am I of these changes, too ;
Little to care for, little to rue,—
I on the shore, and thou on the sea.

* * * * *

Lazily rocking on ocean's breast,
Something in common, old friend, have we ;
Thou on the shingle, seek'st thy nest,
I to the waters look for rest—
I on the shore, and thou on the sea.—BRET HARTE.

DURING his fellow-lodgers' absence Theodore Hoffbauer had been steadily getting the better of the brain fever which had so nearly proved fatal to him. The struggle had left him very weak, and, though he was now allowed to see visitors for short periods, the doctor still forbade much excitement and all exposure to cold and fatigue. He had not been left quite alone, for Madam Ledru had been frequently to see him, but with this exception no one else had called, and the chief companion of his convalescence had been

the landlady's little girl 'Battie,' of whom, said her mother, 'Mr. Karl did take a deal of notice.' He pleased himself with imagining that he was perfecting himself in his study of English by his conversations with the child, from whom he certainly picked up a good many words,—though these were not always pronounced with that correctness of accent which professors of the language require from their pupils,—and many curious idiomatic phrases, of which he might have remained long in ignorance, under the teaching of one more cultivated. All these it was his wont to write out carefully in a book which was shewn many years afterwards to the present writer, who found it full of phrases like the following:—

'*A bobee* ; a member of the corps of polizei.'

'*Tip* ; a geschenk of small moneys often given to "bobees," u. s. v.'

'*Shuck fardthing* ; a game of hazard of the English poor man.'

'*Punch or ponsh* ; this word means n. s. the ponsh what you trink which smeckt gut ; 2. the ponsh with Judy, the marionettenspiel (play) of the streets ; 3. ponsh (verbum), to wack (schlagen) with the fist.'

The study of a difficult language is not, however, a very lively recreation for an invalid unless he be of a very studious turn, which Hoffbauer was not, and it may be imagined that, having no companions and very few books, he found the hours hang heavy on his hands. He was, therefore, agreeably interested when Battie one morning, some two or three days before Wilfrid's return, brought him on his breakfast tray a bulky letter bearing the postmark of Hallé, his native town. As he hardly ever now heard from Germany he felt curious as to its contents, so having made the little maiden

happy by the present of the postage stamps, he dismissed her and began eagerly to read his budget while he eat his breakfast. The frequent pauses he made during the meal, the changes which passed over his expressive face, the strange ejaculations he gave vent to, and the deep reverie into which he fell when he ended its perusal, all bore witness to the interesting nature of its contents. As therefore these had the most important influence, not only on his own fortunes, but also on those of all the personages who figure in this history, it will be advisable to impart them at once to the reader.

The letter, which was from Hoffbauer's father, began with expressions of regret at their separation from each other at the glad season of Christmas, and anxious enquiries as to his son's health and prospects. Then, after stating that he enclosed a present of a sum of money which he wished were larger, but which he still hoped would prove acceptable, the writer went on to say that, he now felt it right to make certain disclosures which he had hitherto kept secret from him. 'Did I entertain any hope,' he wrote, 'that I should ever again enjoy the happiness of talking to my dear son face to face, I should hesitate to do this. But alas! Theodore, thou knowest that I am now old and of weak health. Thy offences against the Government must make thee for many years to come an exile, and even were it otherwise, thy stepmother, worthy but misguided woman, will not endure thy presence in our house, while her children claim the greater part of my fortune. I have resolved therefore, after much thought, to tell thee some facts regarding thy dear mother which might perhaps prove of use,—though as to that I cannot speak with any certainty,—but which at all events it is right and fitting that thou as a son, should'st know.' His father then proceeded to

explain that there had been a mystery connected with the birth of Mina Hoffbauer, Theodore's mother, who had, as it appeared, been born in Paris, in 1788, and there, on the death of her mother, had been adopted under peculiar circumstances by Theodore's father. In proof of these facts the writer enclosed, together with certain certificates, letters, and papers, a carefully written statement by Theodore's grandfather of the causes which led him to adopt the little Mina when not much more than six months old. This document, which it is necessary that the reader should examine for himself, ran as follows :—

I, Richard Hoffbauer, merchant, residing at No. 4, the Hauptgärten Hallé am Saale, have thought it my duty herein fully to recount all the events relating to my adoption of Mina Chessington, now Mina Hoffbauer, and the wife of my son Karl Richard Hoffbauer.

During the years 1787, 1788, and part of 1789, my business drew me to Paris, where I resided in a lodging over the shop of a gunsmith named Rovelli in the Rue de Basfroid. This Rovelli, who was partly Italian and only French by the mother's side, was a wealthy man and had also a business as a jeweller in the Rue de Richelieu. His wife would have had him live there, but he was a very timid man, and thinking it wiser to reside where there was an abundance of weapons than where there was plenty to tempt thieves, he would not humour Madam, a brave, honest, little woman, comely in face, but somewhat stern in manner, for she belonged to the reformed faith, which indeed drew us together, that being my own religion. I got in time to be very intimate with my landlord and his wife, who had but one little boy, whom I used to pet a good deal so that he became very fond of me. In the summer of 1788,—I remember it was just

before the minister Neckar was recalled, and the French parliament re-established,—our party was increased by the arrival of Madam's sister, the Mademoiselle Estelle Lèon. Before she came Madam used often to speak with pride and affection of her beauty and good qualities, and would say to me :—‘ Ah! Monsieur Hoffbauer! Estelle would make a nice wife for thee!’ for she knew I was well-to-do, and would, I think, have much liked to have me for a brother-in-law. But this would not do, for I was in the first place betrothed to a maiden in my own native country, and further, it turned out that Mademoiselle herself could not be a party, for she declared she was already married! This Mademoiselle Estelle had been in England with a great family, and had not for some two years seen her sister. They were daughters of a French officer, now some time dead, who had been compelled to leave his profession in great poverty, and while the elder had provided for herself by this rich marriage (which her father, who was descended from an old family, had only agreed to on account of his want of money), the younger had been teaching for her living in England. It was this question of the marriage of Mademoiselle which led to so much sorrow, and eventually to my adopting the little Mina. It became evident soon to all of us, that she was about to become a mother, which made me understand why she had always been so particular to insist that I should style her Madam Chessington; though her sister, Madam Rovelli, would frown when she heard me call her so, and once said to her, loud enough for me to hear :—“ You know you have no right to that name!” which made the poor lady blush, and the tears come into her eyes. I could see that all was not happy between the sisters, and there

were often tears and upbraidings between them, while the manner of Madam Rovelli grew sterner than ever. That of her sister was very gentle and composed, with a dignified sadness that was very touching, and she was, without doubt, very beautiful. Well, the year drew on, and with it, as all know, the troubles of France increased. The democrats grew ever more violent, and changes were more and more talked of, so that Rovelli and other traders began to grow anxious. I myself also began to feel that I should do well to think of returning to Hallé, but I determined for the sake of my business to remain as long as it was safe to do so.

On the night of Christmas, 1788, Madam Chessington—as she would style herself, poor soul—gave birth to a little daughter, no other than Mina, who is now the wife of my son Karl. She was christened by that name, as is shewn in the certificate of baptism which accompanies this. I could see that Madam Rovelli was very grieved at this time, though I did not then know why. She grew very silent and grave, and it was easy to see that she had something on her mind. So the time passed, and the baby throve, and her mother recovered, till in the month of May the great Revolution began. Though there was no violence at first, prudent men soon began to ask each other after the meeting of the estates on the 5th of the month, what was to be the end of it all? When King Louis took his seat on the throne all the deputies rose and covered themselves,—they who in old times had been used to speak only on their knees, and remain uncovered. Then this *Tiers état* would not fall in with the scheme of Necker, the minister, for establishing two chambers, and at last, after several weeks of wrangling and conflict, declared itself the

'National Assembly,' and all taxes not voted by it illegal! All this made us traders feel very apprehensive, and Rovelli spoke constantly of moving with all he possessed to Milan where he had friends and kinsmen. Then came the famous 'Tennis Court Oath,' and the meetings at the residence of the Duke of Orleans, the Palais Royal, and Rovelli used to congratulate himself that we did not live over the shop in the Rue de Richelieu, near the scene of those noisy gatherings. Each day the situation grew more alarming, till on the 1st July the *Gardes Francaises* broke into mutiny, and after that Rovelli made up his mind to fly, and managed, very cleverly and secretly, to sell his jeweller's business after transporting a great part of his stock to Milan. For my part I resolved to go too, but I agreed to stay with the family till their departure, which was fixed for the last day of the month, for I began to feel so interested in all that was taking place that curiosity got the better of prudence. It was destined, however, that we should all go much sooner than any of us anticipated.

Rovelli was so alarmed by the riot which took place on the 11th July,—when the mob, enraged by the dismissal of Necker, and with Camille Desmoulin for a leader, shed the first blood of the Revolution,—that he was for leaving Paris next day. It would have been well at least for one of our party if he had not yielded to his wife's advice, but Madam, who was always loth, as she said, to run away, persuaded him to remain one day more. That evening the sisters had a very bitter quarrel, so much so that neither would speak to the other, and each sought their beds without saluting, which they usually did most affectionately. Next morning, as we were all busy making preparations for

departure, Rovelli, who had gone out as he usually did to the Café close by at the corner where the Rue St. Bernard enters the Rue du Faubourg St. Antoine, rushed suddenly into the room as white as a sheet—

‘They are coming ! quick, they are coming !’ cries he quite breathless.

‘Who?’ asked we, all together, the women turning as pale as Rovelli.

‘The devils! the murderers! the robbers! the people, as they call themselves! They are breaking into all the gunsmiths’ shops! The troops are withdrawn! We are lost!’ And he stood there gesticulating wildly.

‘Bah!’ cries Madam, trying to look contemptuous. ‘For shame! Calm thyself! It is only a rumour. We hear such all day.’

‘I tell you it is truth, fool!’ answered her husband in a frenzy of fear. ‘The mob were moving down the Rue de Rivoli when I left the Café Dubourg but now—a moment ago.’

Scarcely had he spoken when we heard the roar of the advancing rioters, and that terrible sound made us all quail, and unnerved even brave little Madam Rovelli who sat down and began to weep. I went out on to the balcony, and there sure enough they were, that evil rabble, making straight for the shop of Monsieur Dennis, who, luckily for us, poor man, had a small gunsmith’s business close by at the corner of the Rue St. Bernard, which was the continuation of our street, joining it to the Rue du Faubourg St. Antoine. Never before or since have I looked on such faces. Every bad passion was written in the most of them, and fierce anger blazed in the eyes of all. But the worst were the drunken women who howled, and shouted, and brandished their arms.

‘They will not hurt us,’ cried I, anxious to make the best of things, ‘if we let them take what they desire. It is the weapons they want. Take courage, ladies; if we all slip round by the back way into the baker’s house next door, we shall be safe. Everything of value is put away now. Rovelli and I will hide these boxes under the dust-heap at the back, if you Madam, and your sister Madame Estelle, will take the children and go quickly.’

They saw that what I urged was best. Our next door neighbour Monsieur Blanc, the baker, was an old friend of Rovelli’s, and the two little yards behind their houses communicated with each other, fortunately for us. Rovelli and I worked like horses, and in ten minutes we had managed to hide our few remaining boxes,—for most of those containing our property had already been removed to Fontainebleau,—under the heap of dust and rubbish in the yard above mentioned. We were busy over this when Madam Rovelli with her little boy, followed by the ‘bonne’ with Madam Chessington’s infant, passed through the yard and entered Monsieur Blanc’s house.

‘Where is Madam Estelle?’ cried I.

‘She comes immediately,’ replied her sister. ‘Go and call her, good Monsieur Hoffbauer, I beg! It is some silly papers that delay her.’

In two minutes more we had done what was necessary to conceal our boxes, and, leaving Rovelli to take his way to Monsieur Blanc’s, I hurried back into the house, calling ‘Madam Estelle! Madam Estelle!’ I was only just in time, for the mob had got what they could of poor Monsieur Dennis’ property, and our turn had come. They were busy breaking in the door of the

shop, which we had fortunately locked, and which was of good stout oak. Madam Chessington was still at the top of the house. 'I come directly,' answered she, quietly.

'For God's sake be quick!' cried I, getting angry at her coolness, and bounding up the stairs I met her leisurely descending as I reached the second floor, holding a small box bound with brass clasps in one hand and a reticule in the other. The sound of a heavy fall, followed by a savage yell from the mob, told us that they had forced the door. I seized the box and thrust it into my vest, fearing that the robbers would think it was money, and, grasping her by the hand, hurried her down the stairs. As we reached the ground-floor two ruffians burst through the door which opened from the shop into the hall. I had a pistol in my belt and, foolishly perhaps, I grasped it half involuntarily as if to fire.

'Ah you resist!' shouts one of the villains, who were both half drunk, and, with a filthy oath, and "Vive la Republique!" he made a clumsy lunge at me with a pike. I easily avoided him, but poor Madam Chessington, whom I strove to drag with me, was not quick enough in her movements, and the weapon made a cruel wound in her side. She would have fallen had I not caught her in my arms. The ruffian who had wounded her overbalanced himself in his drunken rage, and as he fell his head luckily dashed against the corner of a table, which rendered him senseless. Then a happy thought came to me.

'Brother Citizen,' I said in a low tone to the other robber, 'There is wine in the cupboard upstairs; and doubtless there is gold in the *escritoire*. Quick before others arrive. Shall I show you?'

‘Gold ! wine !’ cries he. ‘I will find them alone ! Stir not on your peril !’ And he ran up the stairs.

Fortunately the rest of the mob were as yet too engrossed in plundering the shop to think of the other parts of the house, and I was able to make my escape to Mons. Blanc’s house, bearing with me Madam Estelle, senseless and bleeding. After a time she came to herself again, and we got a doctor as soon as the mob had done pillaging the shop and it became safe to go abroad again. When he had examined the wound he told us that Madam Estelle could live but a few hours, and with that the grief of her sister, who was already quite overcome by her condition, became terrible. She fell on her knees by the other and implored her forgiveness for her harshness and injustice, till Madam Estelle at last murmured, ‘I forgive thee, dearest Sophie, most fully,’ and the two wept together. Meanwhile Rovelli was in a state of great agitation, vowing that he would leave the city at daybreak the next morning. This led to a stormy scene between him and his wife, who declared that she would never desert her sister and her little niece.

‘That little bastard !’ roars Rovelli. ‘Do you value her more than your own son ! Woman, if you do not come I leave without you ! there !’ Cowardice had made him brutal, though naturally he was a very kindly man and had hitherto treated his sister-in-law and her child with more tenderness than his wife had. Pitying their perplexity, I volunteered to stay with Madam Rovelli and bring her on to Fontainebleau if her husband would await us there with the two children till poor Madam Estelle should be laid at rest. This proposition however so distressed the latter that even Rovelli’s selfish fear was touched. She implored her sister

not to desert her child—her little Mina. She, Estelle, felt that she had but a few short hours to live, she said ; and if her sister would go with her husband and her own child and would take little Mina with her to a place of safety, and promise never to desert her, she would give her the greatest happiness that it was in her power to confer. I think the poor soul mistrusted Rovelli after she heard his speech about her child. After a great deal of sorrowful discussion it was at length arranged that I should stay with Madam Estelle to the end, and that the Rovellis, taking the two children, should set out at noon next day for Fontainebleau, which was as yet comparatively quiet, secure our effects, and await me there.

A more sorrowful parting than that of the sisters cannot be imagined, Madam Estelle imploring her sister to ‘love and cherish her little Mina,’ and the latter giving her the most earnest assurances that she would always treat her as her own child. At last Madam Rovelli was forced to tear herself away, weeping as though her heart would break, for delay was dangerous as it was rumoured that the democrats were about to do some terrible deed. Madam Chessington died on the night after they had started on their journey, very peacefully, and without much suffering. I was with her till the last, and she charged me with many earnest messages to her sister concerning the little Mina, and bade me particularly enjoin her to keep carefully the box with brass clasps which I had taken charge of when we had left the house together on that fatal morning. It contained important papers, she said, which she wished her sister to read and preserve for the sake of her child.

We buried the ill-fated lady in the cemetery of Mont Parnasse, Mons. Blanc, his wife, and myself being of

course the only people present. I arranged for a small wooden cross with the name, 'Estelle Chessington,' which the dead lady set such store by, inscribed on it. I have never myself visited Paris since those days, but I am sure Monsieur Blanc would not neglect such a matter and that he saw it duly erected. He and his wife were most kind and worthy people, whom I should like to meet once more. The next morning I bade them adieu and have never heard anything of them since that day. Poor people, they must have fared ill when the time of famine began.

When I reached Fontainebleau I found fresh troubles had arisen for poor Madam Rovelli. Her husband flatly refused to have anything to do with poor little Mina, whom he chose to call a bastard. He would not mind paying a little, he said, but he would never take the child into his house. He was, as I have said, naturally timid, and was also inclined to be close-fisted, and his troubles had quite deadened all his natural kindly feelings. At the request of his wife I tried to argue with him, but one might as well have argued with the trees in the forest of Fontainebleau; and at last, being perhaps foolishly tender-hearted, and feeling an intense pity for the poor helpless child and for Madame Rovelli's distress, I offered to adopt Mina myself. Madam accepted my proposal with a transport of gratitude I shall never forget, telling me I was devoted, noble, generous, and I know not what beside; seizing both my hands, and being in a state half tears, half laughter all the time, for she was an excitable little personage like most who come from her province of Gascony. Her husband, with a laugh, said he believed she would have kissed me if he had not been present, whereupon I made bold to raise her hand to my

lips, and told her with my best bow that I had never been so honoured in my life before.

It was arranged that she should send me money regularly from Milan for the child, and that I should from time to time inform her of its progress; and then she confided to me the cause of the difference between her sister and herself. The latter, it appeared, had declared that she had been secretly married to a young English gentleman of the name of Chessington, a lieutenant in the army, but that the marriage had been kept carefully concealed on account of the displeasure it would cause her husband's father, a man of great property, very proud, and very severe with his son. This young Chessington had gone with his regiment to India, and when he returned, so the poor lady used to assure her sister, all would be well, and she would be rich and a great lady. But alas! there was absolutely no proof of this fine marriage! Her husband, said Madam Estelle, mistrusted women's ways and was afraid of his father's anger, and therefore he kept the marriage certificate himself. Poor child! she was very simple! All that she had to shew were two or three love-letters signed by this English lieutenant, a locket he had given her containing his hair with Estelle Chessington engraved upon it, and a picture of him. She remembered indeed the name of the place she was married at, and that the only other person present at the ceremony besides the clergyman—(a vulgar, stupid man, she said the latter was)—was the servant of her husband, a soldier named Polton. The name of the place was Colthole in the county of Hillshire, she thought, and the church stood on a hill by itself, far away from all houses. I often searched in English maps for such a place but always in vain.

Madam Estelle had never heard again from this Lieutenant Chessington, though she wrote more than once to him from Paris to the address he had given her in India, nor did Madam Rovelli ever hear anything again about him. It was therefore but too easy to conclude that the marriage was a false one, and that the heartless young officer deserted her. Such things, as all the world knows, and shame be it said, are but too common. Rovelli was as delighted as his wife at my decision, and lavished so many fulsome epithets on me that I at last grew angry, for his cowardice and selfishness irritated me. However, I took Mina and her *bonne* with me to Halle, and Madam Rovelli gave me the birth certificate but kept for herself the letters, the locket, and the portrait of the English lieutenant. She secretly hoped, poor woman, that her husband would relent some day, or that she might survive him and so get back the little maiden into her charge. Parting with her was a bitter trial, not only to her tender heart, but to her conscience, for she was perhaps over scrupulous, and had been always excessively fond of the child's mother, her severity towards whom she never ceased to reproach herself with.

When I reached Halle with a *bonne* and an infant there was, as may be supposed, a good deal of railing and some scandal-making, among my friends and acquaintances, but my wife, though she might well have fought shy of me, and declined to abide by our betrothal, never doubted my version of the story, (and the good God knows it is true every word), for one moment—may heaven reward her for her loving belief in me! When we were married, two months after my return, the child and her nurse came into the household as part of the family, on which Hans Schneider made a

vastly humorous joke about beginning the married state with a nurse and a baby ready-made. But I forgive the poor fool for I know he did not really doubt me, and he was ever an amusing fellow over a seidel of beer.

Regularly, four times a year, I received from Madam Rovelli remittances for Mina's maintenance with earnest enquiries as to her well-being, all of which were duly acknowledged, and duplicates of my receipts for the money are placed with this paper. When, however, Mina was twelve years old these payments suddenly ceased towards the end of the year; and, though I wrote four or five times to Madam Rovelli, I never heard again from her, and the last time my letter was returned unopened. I conclude from this that that lady either died suddenly, or departed from Milan, and that her husband, who never liked the poor child, stopped the payments. I cannot believe that anything but the strongest compulsion would have caused her to discontinue her contribution towards Mina's bringing up, for she was a most affectionate, as well as a very conscientious and religious woman. When Mina grew to eighteen years of age she formed an attachment to my son Karl, who was more than a year her junior, and some four years after they were married. I was careful to have the marriage certificate made out in the name of Mina Chessington, as she was baptized, though I am bound to declare that I doubt her title to the surname.

I have signed this statement in presence of a notary, though I am aware it is not worded exactly in the language or form which the law prescribes. I have, however, preferred to write it with my own hand, instead of entrusting it to one of the legal profession, because I desire that

my son Karl, whom it chiefly concerns, should learn from me, as plainly and fully as I can state the matter, how and why I was led to adopt into my family his present wife, Mina Hoffbauer, and that he may judge for himself what right she has to that surname of Chessington which she bore previous to her marriage.

I, the said Richard Hoffbauer, having been duly sworn on the Holy Evangelists by John Schreibmeister, Notary Public, do hereby solemnly declare that all that I have here written is true, and contains nothing but the truth. In witness whereof, I have hereto set my hand and seal, this 14th June, 1821.

Signed, sealed, and delivered, by the said Richard Hoffbauer, in the presence of us :—

JOHN SCHREIBMEISTER, Notary Public, of 2 Krone Platz, Halle.

WILLIAM MAYER, Clerk of the above JOHN SCHREIBMEISTER, of 6 Kleinesaale, Strasse, Halle.

The certificates which were enclosed with the above curious document were : that of the baptism of Mina Chessington, there described as the ‘ daughter, aged six weeks, of George Chessington, Gentleman, a lieutenant in the—regt. of foot of H. M. the King of Great Britain and Ireland, and of Estelle Chessington his wife ’; and also that of her marriage, (in which the lady’s parentage was stated in the same words), to Karl Richard Hoffbauer, son of Richard Hoffbauer, of the firm of Hoffbauer & Son, of Halle am Saale, and of Theodora, his wife. There were also some dozen duplicates of receipts for money received from Madam Rovelli together with the letters written by her from Milan which had accompanied such remittances. Theodore’s father concluded his letter

by saying that he had often discussed this matter with his own father, Richard Hoffbauer, both before and after the latter had drawn out his statement, and that he himself quite concurred in the view that Mina Chessington was in all probability the natural daughter of the ill-fated Estelle Lèon, whose marriage to George Chessington must have been a mock ceremony gone through for the purpose of deceiving the poor lady. 'Nevertheless,' said the writer in conclusion, 'it is always possible that you being in England, which after all is but a small place, might find out something in the matter which might prove of benefit to yourself. With the earnest hope that this may indeed be so, and with great love, and best wishes for thy welfare, my son whom I long so much to behold, I am ever, Theodore, thy affectionate father,

KARL RICHARD HOFFBAUER.'

The reader will not be surprised to hear that the reading of this correspondence considerably interested Theodore Hoffbauer, and perhaps for a time raised his pulse higher than Dr. Block would have thought desirable. He could just remember his grandfather, the Richard Hoffbauer who had been in Paris at the commencement of the French Revolution, as a tall, spare, bent old man, whose sparse white hair was usually covered by a velvet cap, and whose knee breeches and buckles had been the object of his youthful admiration. But he knew him better by his portrait, taken at the time when he was a young man of thirty, and which hung in the dining-room opposite to that of his wife, Theodora Hoffbauer, (done when she was a fresh, blushing young woman of twenty), the grandmother whom he was named after, but had never

seen. Perhaps, as he said to himself with a laugh, he had inherited his revolutionary tendencies from the effect which this episode in his grandfather's life had had on the latter! His mother, who of course had been kept in ignorance of the history of her parentage, had for that very good reason talked but little to her son on the subject. She had been always told, when she asked the curious questions which children will, that her father was an English officer, and her mother a French lady, and that both of them had died when she was still quite a baby. These facts she had repeated to her son Theodore, but more than this she had never heard, nor, as she grew up amid the circle of her adopted parents, relatives and friends, had she ever cared to make further enquiries. She had no memories of the past in connection with those other parents who were quite unknown to her. Her first recollections had been of Hallé, and with them she was naturally quite satisfied. Richard Hoffbauer, whom she called father, had never even told her of Madam Rovelli, for she had been too young to understand the matter at the time when the correspondence between them ceased.

To her son Theodore, therefore, this sudden disclosure of the history of her parentage came with considerable force. It is true that he had pretty well outlived the age of sentiment, and that it did not affect him at forty years of age,—when our deceased grandmother, apart from property which may be inherited from her, has usually ceased to have much hold on our strongest affections,—as it might perhaps have done at eighteen. Still the feeling of interest in our near belongings is one that somehow survives a good many of our other natural instincts, and it interested him to think that there was just

the chance that he might be able to find out additional facts which would solve conclusively the question of his grandmother's legitimacy, and that in so doing he might perhaps 'find out something,' as his father said, 'which might prove of benefit' to him. The point which naturally struck him most was the odd coincidence that his reputed grandfather, George Chessington, should have borne the same name as the man he had saved at Frankfort and who had now in turn helped him. For a moment it occurred to him that he might write and mention this fact to Walter ; but he soon found himself laughing heartily at the idea. That he, an outcast such as Walter knew him to be, should presume on their slight acquaintance so far as to claim a kinship which would most probably turn out to be one on the wrong side of the blanket amused him excessively. After all Chessington was not such a very uncommon name, and there might be plenty of families who bore it in England. He remembered now that there was a grocer called Chessington whose shop was just opposite the Rev. Mr. Caneby's Academy at Ealing, where he used to teach German to the junior classes. No ; he would wait and think it over, and take some one's advice,—Frederica's perhaps, but some Englishman's would be better,—and then see what could be done. After all, as he said to himself, it was a matter of but little moment to him. All his life he had been a restless wanderer, a bird of passage most at home when the sea was roughest and storms were brewing ; why should he care for relationships and genealogies at his time of life !

The next few days, however, he found himself thinking over the matter a good deal though without much result. He read his grandfather's statement over and over again

till he had quite mastered all the facts it contained, and having, through Battie, procured an atlas and made sure of the position of Hillshire in England, he searched laboriously for Collhole or Colehole. That he failed to find the place thus referred to was not to be wondered at considering there is no such village in Hillshire, or, so far as the writer is aware, in England, but his failure nevertheless rather disappointed him. Frederica, for some reason or other, was at this time prevented from coming to see him, so that he was unable to take counsel with her on the matter; but soon a new turn was given to his thoughts by the intercourse which, after Wilfrid Oakburne's return, began to spring up between the latter and himself.

Wilfrid rose somewhat late after his journey, breakfasted somewhere about noon, and in short passed rather a lazy day. By the time that the growing darkness of the evening had rendered it necessary to light the candles and make up the fire, he felt rather tired of his own society; and, not being inclined to read, either for improvement or pleasure, he bethought him of paying Mr. Karl a visit. 'We are companions in misfortune,' said he to himself; for he was very miserable and depressed as the reader knows, and his melancholy had not been improved by being alone all day. So presently Hoffbauer was surprised from a doze into which he had fallen by the entry of Mrs. Hollis, with the announcement that Mr. Oakburne wanted to see him. 'One of my gentlemen who is lodging here,' explained the landlady, in answer to his astonished enquiry who '*Oakbunn*' was. 'They've all enquired after you a good deal, Mr. Karl, as I have told

you sir ; and they have sent you fruits and wine, and such like sir, very often.'

'Himmel! Is it so! They are very good!' replied the invalid, who heard the last part of her information for the first time. 'Let him enter, pray,' and he rose and saluted Wilfrid with his best bow.

The first visit was of course marked by rather an awkward stiffness. Hoffbauer greeted his visitor with much cordiality, as 'Oakbunn,' thanking him for 'your most obliging kindness during my sick health.'

Then Wilfrid of course hoped he was 'getting all right again now;' to which Hoffbauer, feeling he was at home in this sort of dialogue, replied, 'very well, I zank you. Mosh bettare now. All right again soon, you know; and all zat.'

After Wilfrid's remark that 'we have been having unusually severe weather this winter,' had been assented to by Hoffbauer, and the latter, proud of his knowledge of the art of English conversation, had advanced the opinion that 'ze state of politish by ze east is fery anxious for England. War is on the verge of outbursting, I think,' a very long pause had succeeded Wilfrid's agreement with this profound observation. Then it happily occurred to the latter to ask Theodore if he cared about reading, and, on his replying in the affirmative, he volunteered to lend him 'Vanity Fair.' With that wonderful book Hoffbauer was as much delighted as most of its readers have been, and he was almost equally pleased with the study of Pickwick, to which Oakburne afterwards introduced him. These two books he declared, taught him far more English than all his 'grammatique and phrazeologie,' and their discussions on them and on the peculiarities of our language

and manners soon served to make them more at home with each other. Owing to various causes both Throckmorton and Norton put off their return to Poulford Street, and Beverley Chipps, who came back a couple of days after Wilfrid, was so engrossed with a new, and most important literary work that he was away every day and all day. Thus it fell out that Oakburne and Theodore Hoffbauer saw a good deal of each other at this time. The latter, accustomed to mix with all sorts of men, and naturally of a cheery and volatile disposition, was pleased and touched by Wilfrid's kindness in sending him little comforts and coming to see him in his sickness, and soon managed to make himself very pleasant to him. Wilfrid for his part was agreeably surprised to find that 'Mr. Karl' was so much of a gentleman, and found himself listening with a good deal of interest and amusement to the accounts he now and then gave of the varied experiences of his wandering life, and thus, as has been said, the friendship between the two gradually became closer and more confidential. In this way it came about that owing to a certain unexpected little trouble that befell Wilfrid Oakburne, Hoffbauer was led to consult the latter with regard to the information which had been communicated to him from Halle. The causes which led to this confidence, and how Wilfrid received it, must however be made the subject of a separate chapter.

CHAPTER XVII.

Complications and Confidences.

Twist ye, twine ye ! even so,
 Mingle shades of joy and woe,
 Hope, and fear, and peace, and strife,
 In the thread of human life.—SCOTT.

The beck grows wider, the hands must sever,
 On either margin, our songs all done,
 We move apart, while she singeth ever,
 Taking the course of the stooping sun.

* * * * *

Glitters the dew and shines the river,
 Up comes the lily and dries her bell ;
 But two are walking apart for ever,
 And wave their hands for a mute farewell.

—JEAN INGELow.

IT was chiefly in the evening that Wilfrid paid his visits to Hoffbauer, for he was now working very hard to try and gain a certain prize medal granted by the Hospital authorities, which had long been the object of his ambition. He therefore devoted the greater part of his time to reading, and such leisure as he had he employed in trying to ascertain the whereabouts of Lois Simcox, whose father he kept duly informed of the result of his efforts.

These were at first by no means successful. To begin with, he did not know under what name she was acting, for though he had preserved the playbill of the piece in which he had seen her, it gave him no further information than the fact that the parts of the members of the Princess' suite, in which Lois had figured, had been performed by some dozen young women with remarkably high sounding names. In order, however, that he might leave no stone unturned, he determined to make enquiries at the theatre about the girl who bore the least pretentious of these,—a certain Amelia Jenkins, who also appeared in the bill of the new piece which had replaced the burlesque.

He therefore went one afternoon to the 'Momus,' and after losing his way in various dark passages, and after one or two fruitless enquiries, he was at last told that perhaps Mr. Isaack could give him the information he wanted. He was therefore shewn into the dingy little sanctum of that gentleman, a Hebrew youth of about twenty, dressed in the height of fashion, who informed him that Amelia Jenkins was a 'lady super' and was at present playing one of the 'lady butterflies' in the pantomime of *Little Queen Topsy and Harlequin Prince Turvey; or the Gorgeous Home of the Golden Butterflies*, 'and that's about all as I can tell you,' added he.

Wilfrid explained that he wasn't sure whether Amelia Jenkins was the person he wanted to see. He was making enquiries for a girl who had left her friends, and who, he knew, had been acting at the 'Momus' some months before.

'Left her friends! oh ah! that vay. I see dnow. Why didn't yer say so before;,' and the Hebrew, who was not an ill-natured fellow, then suggested that, as

there was a rehearsal coming off in a quarter-of-an-hour, Wilfrid should take his stand in the passage, where he would see the *corps de balet* file past him. 'I don't think you'll find it's Amelia Jenkins,' remarked Mr. Isaack. 'I don't think she ever had no friends to leave, leastways she must have left 'em a precious long time back.'

Wilfrid willingly agreed to this proposition, and resigned himself to listening patiently to Mr. Isaack, who rattled away with great affability about the 'profession,' the 'fair sex,' and 'society,' till a dirty boy tapped at the door and shouted, 'Isaack wanted.' Then arming himself with a big key, and carefully dusting his boots with his handkerchief, he led the way to a recess at the end of a long dark passage, terminated by a closed door, outside which a great deal of scuffling and giggling was heard; and the door having been unlocked, the 'lady butterflies,' some twenty in number, of all ages and degrees of plainness and prettiness, streamed in.

It was soon evident that Mr. Isaack was right in his surmise, and that Amelia Jenkins was certainly not Lois Simcox.

'No, she's not here,' said Wilfrid, after the last of the 'lady butterflies' had disappeared into the 'wings;' and after thanking Mr. Isaack for his services, and proffering him a *douceur*, which was graciously accepted, he returned home rather disheartened by the result of his visit.

He now determined to ask the advice of Beverley Chipps, who had, he knew, written one or two little things for the stage, and was therefore acquainted with various managers.

'My dear fellow,' said the latter, in reply to Wilfrid's request for his assistance, 'my dear fellow! let me warn

you to have nothing to do with that kind of woman. I am your senior, and so entitled to give you advice, eh ?

‘It is a poor girl—,’ began Wilfrid.

‘Pooh ! pooh ! they are all *poor girls*. Take my advice. I have had experience of the world my boy. Why, there was a man in my old office, the “Parchments Preservations” you know, who came to most signal grief in that way, about a *poor girl*.’ Beverley Chipps, as has been said, had begun his career in the Civil Service. ‘Poor little Flutterby was a very quiet good fellow too in many ways, and his case is one out of a hundred I know of.’

‘You misunderstand me,’ said Wilfrid. ‘This is a girl I used to know down at home.’

‘Oh ho !’ said the latter, looking very knowing, ‘that’s it, is it ! sly dog !’

‘No Beverley, it’s nothing of the kind,’ cried Wilfrid, rather inclined to be angry, and then he explained as fully as he thought necessary the circumstances regarding Lois.

‘Ah well ! that perhaps rather alters the case,’ said Beverley Chipps when he had finished. ‘And the part you are taking in the matter does you credit, Oakburne. I do happen to know the manager of the “Momus,” and if you like, we will go there together and enquire. Still I advise you to be careful. I’ve lived in town, my dear boy, since I was eighteen, and as I’m nearly five-and-thirty, I have naturally picked up some experience. Gad ! I remember coming up to enter the office a hearty, fresh little chap, without a hair on my face, and as innocent as a baby. Ah ! we were a wild lot at the “Old Parchments,” as we used to call it !’ and Beverley Chipps, whose natural kindness of heart had been but little

impaired by these not altogether improving experiences of his youth, and who had taken a great fancy to Oakburne, lighted a fresh cigar and proceeded to relate various reminiscences of his career as a government clerk and a literary man, till it was time to go to bed.

A few days after, true to his promise, he took Wilfrid to the 'Momus Theatre,' and being fortunate enough to find Mr. Vernon Trapster, the manager, at home, he introduced him to him, and explained his errand.

Mr. Vernon Trapster, who bore a sort of distant resemblance to Mr. Isaack, listened patiently, though with rather a bored air, and at last, with a rather discouraging shake of the head, he said he feared it was rather a hopeless business.

'We owe you ten thousand apologies, Vernon Trapster,' said Beverley Chipps in his best manner, 'you must be very busy.'

'Vewy busy,' answered the other,—who cultivated a lisp—vewy busy, vewy,—dem'ned busy in fact,' and he ran his fat, white hand, covered with rings, through his curly black locks, which he wore very long. 'Can you describe the girl?' he asked Wilfrid.

Wilfrid gave as clear a description as he could of the schoolmaster's daughter.

'Ah!' said Mr. Trapster, who had listened with a smile that showed his very white teeth to advantage. 'Ah! ye-es, gwey eyes, with dark bwown hair, and marked eyebrows,—ye-es. Your description is gwaphic, but er women are so much alike. But I'll see what we can do for you.'

Then he rang a bell and summoned Mr. Isaack, who recognised Wilfrid by an almost imperceptible but very very knowing wink, and an imposing ledger was brought

in, and at last Mr. Trapster after studying it attentively in silence for some moments said :—

‘What do you say to Miss S. Lois, eh? How does that sound, Beverley Chipps, eh?’

‘That must be her,’ cried Wilfrid eagerly.

‘You take gweat interest in her, eh?’ and Trapster smiled at Wilfrid in a way that made the latter long to kick him, and began picking his teeth with a gold tooth-pick.

‘Yes! I told you,’ put in Beverley Chipps quickly, ‘she’s the only daughter of the village schoolmaster, where his people’s place is, and the rector and all the people in the neighbourhood take an interest in the case.’

‘My people’s place, indeed!’ thought Wilfrid with amused surprise.

‘Indeed! does ’m gweat credit; very intewesting,’ said the manager with a grin.

‘And what is the address?’

‘Well, oddly enough, I see there is a note of the address. I don’t know why. Perhaps she was good-looking, eh?’

‘Ah, you dog!’ cries Wilfrid’s friend in a manner highly pleasing to this Don Juan. ‘And what is it, eh?’

‘Well, here it is my good fellow. I’ll write it down; though I daresay she’s gone ages ago,’ and he wrote down, “Miss S. Lois, 21 Bede Street, Euston Road,” on a piece of paper which he handed to Wilfrid.

Then he offered his guests a glass of sherry, and after Beverley Chipps had duly praised the wine, (“I can’t make out how the deuce you always manage to get such good sherry, Vernon Trapster”), and the manager had discoursed a little on society in a way calculated to show that he moved in the very highest circles, the pair took

their departure with many expressions of thanks to him for his trouble.

‘Not at all; chawmed, I assure you,’ said he. ‘See you at the “Hellikon” to-night, Beverley, eh?’

‘Not to-night. Very busy just now,’ replied Wilfrid’s friend; and, as they walked away, he explained to him that the ‘Hellikon’ was a literary club to which they both belonged.

‘Of course his name’s no more Vernon Trapster than yours or mine is. It’s Abraham Trapp. He was a son of Miss Abrahams, the great tragic actress who married Trapp, the hairdresser in Conduit Street. He’s retired and dead long since, but I’ve often had my haircut there as a youngster. You heard me praise his sherry? miserable rubbish, isn’t it? Of course I was obliged to. It comes from Cobler and Bishop the great refreshment contractors and wine merchants. Trapster’s sister, who was a great beauty by the way, married Jeremy Cobler, and so of course our friend Vernon does his best to push the poisonous liquor. Vernon, indeed! Well, here we must part,’ and he made his way to his club in Pall Mall, while Wilfrid, thanking him very heartily, went back to his books, rejoiced by the hope that at last there was some chance of finding Lois.

Bede Street, Euston Road, was not more than ten minutes’ walk from his own lodgings, and he found his way there without any difficulty the following afternoon. It was with a beating heart that he knocked at the door of No. 21. All the way he had been rehearsing in his mind all that he would say, and how he would greet the poor girl whom he expected to find, and it was with a feeling of dismay that he heard the landlady, a stout,

red-faced, honest looking woman, reply to his enquiry for Miss S. Lois; 'No we aint no one of that name here.'

'No one?' cried Wilfrid. 'Are you sure?'

'I ought to know,' was the answer, with a savage grin.

'But have you had no one here of that name? A young woman, tallish, handsome?' and he proceeded to give as clear a description as he could of Lois.

'Ah! well! we had a young woman of that name, like the person you means, here,' said the landlady, folding her arms and gazing sternly at Wilfrid. 'She was here. But she's left more than a month ago.'

'Left! and where has she gone? I am very anxious to find her.'

'Oh! ye're very anxious to find her, are you? Well! I can't tell you,' and she continued to examine him with searching, and anything but amiable looks. 'She had a baby with her, but it died,' said she.

'It died! Ah poor thing!'

'Yes, very sad! aint it? I don't know where she is though.' It was plain from the good woman's defiant looks and short answers, that she mistrusted him, and Wilfrid was about to go away in despair when his eye caught sight of a card in the window, with the name of Mrs. Skibbers on it, and the information that 'washing and mangling was done' at No. 21.

'Is your name Skibbers?' he asked.

'Yes,' was the reply, in a defiant tone. 'Do you know anything against it?'

'No,' said Wilfrid smiling. 'I only know good of it. 'There is a man of that name at Lidfield, in Hillshire, where I live, whom I know something of.' Skibbers was the man, as the reader may remember, who had helped him to carry Lois to her father's house after he

had saved her from drowning, and who considered himself under a debt to Wilfrid's father for having tended his wife and children *gratis* during a dangerous attack of scarlet fever, when the doctor had showed the family much kindness.

‘What! do you come from there? Why, that Skibbers must be my old man’s brother!’ cried the landlady, and after a little enquiry, it turned out that her husband, who was an engine driver, was really the brother of Wilfrid’s acquaintance, and that she had often heard the name of Oakburne favourably mentioned. This discovery made a complete change in Mrs. Skibbers’ manner, and she asked Wilfrid to step in and told him all she could of Lois, to whom she had evidently taken a great liking. For a time the poor girl had supported herself by needlework, and by acting at the theatre where Wilfrid had seen her. Then her baby had died, which, though it was, as Mrs. Skibbers said, perhaps a good thing for both of them, had been a terrible sorrow to her at first. Besides this, the manager of the theatre had persecuted her with his addresses,—Wilfrid now saw why Mr. Vernon Trapster had taken an interest in Lois, and respected and liked him accordingly,—and what with this, and grief for the death of her child, she had got so miserable, that she had determined to leave London. But she would not tell her landlady where she was going. She dreaded meeting her father, she told the latter, and could not bring herself to face him. She had said she would go into the country, but without specifying where, and had promised to write to Mrs. Skibbers. ‘You see sir,’ said the latter, ‘we was very good friends, what with her coming from my old man’s country and that. And I was with her when she buried her baby in the simming-

try, poor thing, and promised to look at the grave some times. Besides which I liked the girl for herself. I had a daughter once—just like her—went wrong the same—and—poor lass, she threw herself into the canal.’

‘Poor thing!’

‘That’s twelve years ago!’ said the mother, drawing the back of her rough red hand across her eyes. ‘Twelve years! but I aint likely to forget it! But Lois is very good—better than most. Not like my poor little Jinny, who was always a wild little thing. Ah! he must have been a regular bad ’un who ruined Lois!’

‘You are right!’ cried Wilfrid fiercely. ‘He must have been a thorough-paced villain!’ and then he told Mrs. Skibbers of the sufferings poor Lois’ father had gone through, and how he was trying for his sake to seek her out. ‘You will tell me if you do hear anything, Mrs. Skibbers, won’t you?’ said he. ‘This is my address.’

‘That I will,’ she replied, taking the card he gave, and the two parted very good friends.

‘Hst, Hst!’ he heard, as he was walking moodily down the street, and turning, he saw Mrs. Skibbers running after him.

‘I say!’ said she, when she had recovered her breath, ‘I say! you didn’t want to know where she was afore she came to me, did you?’

‘Well, I don’t know. Perhaps it might be of use.’

‘Ah! well I can’t tell you that neither,’ replied the good lady.

‘Then I am sorry you took the trouble to run after me,’ said Wilfrid.

‘Look here!’ said she, drawing him aside, and speaking in a whisper, ‘Look here! It’s this! You’re quite on the square, aint you? You mean fair to the girl, don’t

you? I don't know anything about you, sir, asking your pardon. You might be the man who ruined her for all I know! You don't mean harm to Lois, now, do you?' .

For a moment Wilfrid felt a little angry, but the recollection of the construction that all he had had to do with her at first put on his conduct speedily checked any such inclination. 'You have a right to be suspicious Mrs. Skibbers,' he said, 'and your question is natural enough. If it will satisfy you I will swear most solemnly that I only want to restore Lois to her father. I have a great esteem for her. I'm not ashamed to say I regard her as a friend. I'll swear it if it will ease your mind.'

'No, no!' cried the good woman. 'No, no! I'll believe you without that! you're a good feller, sir! excuse me! Give me your hand! Anything I can help you with, I will,' and without waiting for an answer she grasped his hand in her big fist, and then walked rapidly back to her house.

Wilfrid could not help laughing as he resumed his way, after watching for a moment the massive figure of Mrs. Skibbers sail down the street with a see-saw action that reminded him of an old-fashioned three-decker going into port on a rough sea, and he went home well satisfied with the result of his visit.

When he woke next morning and thought over his interview with Mrs. Skibbers, it seemed still more satisfactory, and he resolved that he would write at once to Mr. Simcox, and tell him that at last there was a hope of finding his daughter. He dressed and went down, feeling in better spirits than he had been for a long time.

He would be able to restore Lois to her father, he felt

pretty confident of gaining the prize medal, and by the end of the spring he would have completed his course and be qualified to write M.D. after his name. Then he would settle down at Lidfield, where his reputation must ere long be cleared up, and then Beatrice would—but at this point his pleasant schemes were interrupted by the entry of Mrs. Hollis with his breakfast and a letter.

‘A nice morning, sir!’ said she. ‘We shall have Mr. Norton and Mr. Throckmorton back by end of the week, sir. I say it’s always more cheerful when all my gentlemen’s here together, sir.’ The good woman was quite pleased to see Mr. Oakburne, who had been, as she informed Mr. Karl, ‘a bit low like, I think, sir,’ of late, in such good spirits.

‘It is a very nice morning, Mrs. Hollis. Thank you, I shall be glad to see them back,’ and he proceeded to read his letter.

It was from his sister Ethel, and, after some tender enquiries about himself, and affectionate messages from his mother,—for both the ladies just now regarded Wilfrid as a martyr, who required to be petted and comforted,—it went on to say that Reginald, from whom they had lately heard, was coming home on leave, and was going to spend some time on the continent before returning to England. Then followed a budget of local gossip, the details of which Wilfrid, having plenty of work before him, read rather hurriedly, till his attention was suddenly aroused by the last paragraph of the letter.

‘And now, dear Wilfrid,’ said the writer, ‘prepare yourself for a *great* piece of news. Beatrice Elkfield, your old flame, is going to be married to—whom do you think? Well, Mr. *Walter Chessington*, our *future* member as I may call him, for everyone now says his election

is *certain*. They are to be married directly after it is decided, and it is not improbable that *I* may be asked to be a *bridesmaid*. It has been *coming on* for a *long* time. *I* saw it *ages* ago. I'm sure it is a very good match for both in a *worldly* point of view, and of course that *is* important, and they *seem* very happy. How fearfully proud the Elkfield people will be!—at least Mr. Elkfield will. Mere nobodies mamma says they were forty years ago. I know you used to admire Beatrice *once*, but I'm glad to think you've got over it, for though she is my friend, and I am fond of her in a way, I have always thought her a great flirt.'

A bitter pang went through Wilfrid's heart as he flung down the letter and went to the window. Married! Beatrice, whom he remembered almost since he could remember anything, going to be married! and to Walter Chessington! a stranger almost! It seemed only the other day, that she called him Wilfrid again, and asked him to come and see them and made him hope. . . . and now she has passed from him for ever! Going to be married to Walter Chessington!

The sun seems to have clouded over suddenly, though the passers by in the street do not perceive it, and are commenting on the unwonted brilliancy and warmth of its light. Perhaps it is the mist that rises in his eyes, as he stands there gazing out at the human stream which is beginning to flow down the thoroughfare. He is not conscious of the wayfarers passing before him, or of the thousand sounds that tell that the great city is astir and that the business of life has begun again. What is it all to him! He stands at the window in a sort of waking dream . . . A thousand reminiscences of Beatrice, her ways, her looks, her voice, flash on his memory as

he realises with a sense of dull hopeless pain that now all his planning, hoping, and longing, must cease for ever. He had never known till now how much he had loved her, and what a precious possession his castle in the air had grown to be to him. Does anyone indeed ever thoroughly love or value things or people in this world, till the sense of injury aroused when they are taken from them, makes the worth of the lost treasure apparent, or, as sometimes happens, raises it above its true standard? Wilfrid's castle in the air, at all events, was ruthlessly shattered now, and for a time his mind seemed to have no room for anything but the contemplation of its destruction.

'Ho there, Battie!' cried a loud voice outside. 'Battie, my poots please bring. Quickly my schild if it please you, with my goat also;' and Mr. Karl's demands, given from the top of the kitchen stairs, for these and other articles of clothing, roused Oakburne to the fact that he could not afford to spend the day in regretful reverie, and he sat down and tried to eat his breakfast. But it was no good. The bread seemed like sawdust, the butter nasty, the tea undrinkable; and he gave up the attempt in disgust. It was time to go to the Hospital, and after all work was the best consoler, and so he went off to St. Christopher's.

In spite of his efforts to banish it, however, the feeling of depression weighed on him throughout the day, and in the evening, after a cheerless dinner alone at a restaurant, he determined to try and divert his thoughts by a visit to Hoffbauer. The German whom he found reclining on his sofa with a heap of papers on the table near him, and enjoying his usual evening cigar, gave him a hearty welcome, but though Oakburne did his best to be

lively and cheerful, his friend soon saw that he was evidently in low spirits.

‘I have been reading poetry, Vilfrid,’ said he, after an unusually long pause. ‘The poetry of Schiller. Ah how grand! But you English—you do not understand poetry! no!’

‘We have our poets,’ said Wilfrid, scarce knowing what he said.

‘Ah yes, Shagespeare! I know! But you do not understand him as we Germans do! And you have no Schiller, no Goethe! nothing like them in England! no! I have been reading *Der Taucher*. The “Diver” of Schiller. It is glorious! nicht war?’ and Hoffbauer began declaiming the lines in his powerful base voice:—

‘Wohl hört man die Brandung, wohl kehrt sie zuruck ;
 Sie verkündigt der donnernde Schall ;
 Da bückt sich’s hinunter mit liebendem Blick,
 Es kommen, es kommen die Wasser all,
 Sie rauschen herauf, sie rauschen nieder,
 Den Jüngling bringt keines wieder.’

Wilfrid knew the poem well. ‘His was not an uncommon fate’ said he in a tone that made the other stare at him. ‘It is the lot of many! Failure is the fruit of their best efforts, and they are generally made for a prize not worth the winning.’ I have dived for my prize and, like the page in the legend, have been drowned in the whirlpool, and the prize I strove for was no prize at all, was of course what the young fellow really meant by this remarkable speech.

‘What is this then my young fren’, Vilfrid?’ says the other, half-amused, and half-surprised. ‘What fails thee now, then, my boy?’ and he rose and laid his hand kindly on Oakburne’s shoulder.

‘It’s nothing. I am out of sorts, that’s all,’ said Wilfrid, trying to rouse himself.

‘Tell me. Thou hast heard ze pad news? The tailor or the pootman (he meant the shoemaker) shall pursue thee? No. Ah! then it is the maiden? She has not been kind to thee; eh, my boy? Ah! it is ever the womans is the cause of evil from the beginning! Yes, it is so?’

‘This one was everything in the world to me,’ said Wilfrid, with something between an imprecation and a groan.

Hoffbauer went to the cupboard and took out a bottle of Rhine wine, and a box of cigars. ‘So she has married zat ozer fellow, eh?’ said he, lighting a fresh cigar at the candle.

Wilfrid murmured ‘yes.’

‘Ah! zat do they always,’ continues his philosophic comforter, puffing forth a cloud of blue smoke. ‘It is ever so arranged. Fret not thyself, Vilfrid. There are ever as goot as she, and mosh bettare too. Oh yes! Trust me, I have lived much. I have seen mosh of ze womans. I tell you they are not worth ze trouble any of zem. Eh?’ and he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

‘I daresay you’re right!’ said poor Wilfrid.

‘I say to thee do not fret thyself my boy!’ said the good natured fellow as a sudden thought struck him. ‘One glass of gute wine must thou now drink, and also thou shalt smoke this cigar, because I require that you give me thy advice. See here! I too have my perplexions, (he had learnt this pronunciation of perplexities from Mrs. Hollis.) All men are kummervoll sometimes, is it not so? Read zese papare, mein freund, and zay what you shall think. It is imbordent and gonfidenshal Wilfrid!’ And

before he well knew what he was about, Wilfrid found himself drinking Rhine wine, and smoking his cigar as he read that budget, already perused by the reader, which Hoffbauer had received from Germany. As he read, he soon got interested in the history of Estelle Chessington, and his host, who had not before this dreamt of taking his counsel, looked on well pleased as he saw a more cheerful expression come over his young friend's face.

'It is certainly very remarkable' said Wilfrid, when he had finished his reading, 'that the name of your grandmother, that is her—her married name, should be Chessington, the same as that of the man whose life you saved at Frankfort.'

'Eh? yes! It is a queer zing, is it not? Bud the question is my tere fellow if my groszmutter had any right to zis name or not!' He quickly detected Wilfrid's hesitation as he referred to this delicate point.

'That certainly seems not quite clear as yet' said Oakburne, who had been much struck by what he had read. 'Look here. If you will allow me, I should much like to show these papers to Throckmorton—Mr. Throckmorton our fellow-lodger you know. He's a lawyer, and knows all about these things; and he takes an interest in you; and he's one of the best fellows I know into the bargain.'

'So! one of the pest fellows you know into the pargain. Gut! that sounds fery well; but I do not know him my fren' remember.'

'Yes, but he knows you,' cried Wilfrid eagerly. 'Why, it was he who first suggested—,' and then he stopped short, not liking to tell the invalid of the little subscription they had made towards procuring him comforts during his illness.

‘Ah! I know my good Vilfrid,’ says the other, who was very quick. ‘Yes, you have been all fery goot to me, you four gentlemen. I am gradeful. Yes. I shall not forget your kindness. Yes. Well, if you zink it is safe, and that Herr Drogmorling will be so kind, do what you say my boy.’

‘I am sure you may trust him,’ answered Wilfrid with a smile at the other’s pronunciation of Throckmorton’s name. ‘You could not find a better counsellor anywhere. As for thanking us, why, my dear fellow, I assure you we are all only too glad to have been of use. And I must thank you for—for your kindness this evening.’

‘It is a good intentioned youth,’ said the German to himself as he went to bed. ‘That thought of showing my business to the lawyer is good, very good. We shall see what then happens. Bah! what does it matter to me. Doubtless I shall find that it is but a mare’s nest that I have come upon.’

When Mr. Throckmorton returned at the end of the week, Wilfrid duly told him of his interview with Hoffbauer, and showed him the important documents.

‘I am very pleased to have seen them, Oakburne,’ said the latter when he had read them. ‘They have interested me very much, and recalled to me a subject which occupied my thoughts a good deal at one time.’

‘What is that?’ asked Wilfrid.

Mr. Throckmorton did not, however, satisfy his curiosity on this occasion, but told him that he intended to pay Hoffbauer a visit, and have a talk with him about Estelle Chessington and her strange history.


CHAPTER XVIII.

Clears up some points which needed explanation.

Alas, alas, fair Ines !
She went away with song,
With music waiting on her steps,
And shoutings of the throng.
And some were sad, and felt no mirth,
But only music's wrong,
In sounds that sang, Farewell, farewell,
To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines,
That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its decks,
Nor danced so light before.
Alas for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore ;
The smile that blest one lover's heart,
Has broken many more !

Hood.

T must not be supposed that Miss Beatrice Elkfield was altogether such a heartless young lady as her treatment of Wilfrid Oakburne might lead the reader to think. In point of fact her acceptance of Walter Chessington as her future husband had been a very great effort, only accomplished after much bitter self-reproach, and after a great deal of pressure had been brought to bear upon her. She really did love Wilfrid, and had he only paid his farewell visit a little earlier on that day when he had that stormy

explanation with his mother and sister described in a former chapter, he might have won her for his wife. When, after his proposal to her on the eventful night before he first left Lidfield for London, she had written that note which, the reader may remember, she had asked him to answer in person, she had fully meant to show him that she was ready to yield to his pleading, and had also hoped that this encouragement to his suit would lead him, as indeed it had done, to set to work in earnest to make a career for himself. She had watched her old playfellow far more closely than he ever dreamed of; and while the delicate intuition of her sex made her keenly alive both to his merits and his faults, her affection made her eager to try and correct the latter by the only weapons at her disposal,—raillery and banter. Her free use of these, and her natural love of admiration, had led to those early misunderstandings between herself and Wilfrid of which the reader has been informed; but these were all forgotten by both, when Wilfrid had once spoken, and all might have gone well had not the unfortunate report about Lois come to her ears during his absence. As has been said, the fact that Lois was an old acquaintance and *protégé* of Miss Elkfield's made this all the more painful to her, but at first, in spite of her jealousy, shame, and wounded pride, she had been very loth to believe him guilty. It is however by no means an easy matter to believe in the innocence of a person whom all the world condemn, and in whose defence even his own family are unable to say anything. Wilfrid had moreover a most decided enemy in the person of Mr. Elkfield. That gentleman had noticed with great alarm his daughter's growing partiality for young Oakburne,

and, as he was inordinately fond and proud of her, and by no means intended her to marry, such a 'poor match' as he considered Wilfrid to be, he was glad of the handle which this unhappy scandal gave him against him. Though the subject of course was not one that could be discussed in Beatrice's presence, he had ample means of showing by his scowls and disparaging epithets whenever the young fellow's name was mentioned, how very badly he thought of him, and he privately informed his wife, with the view of course that she should report his opinion to Beatrice, that 'he considered him an idle, good-for-nothing young rascal.'

Mrs. Elkfield, however, had a great regard and liking for Wilfrid, and stoutly refused to believe anything against him, and therefore, much to her husband's disgust, would at first do nothing to prejudice the liking which she knew her daughter had for him. She was, it must be owned, rather of a sentimental disposition, and having married for love herself in the face of a good deal of very bitter opposition from her parents and family,—who could not bear that a daughter of the good old house of Thornton should marry Joseph Elkfield the 'wool man,'—she had a sneaking tenderness for Wilfrid's passion, and had perhaps even secretly fostered the boy and girl love which had so early sprung up between the pair. She now therefore privately did her best to console her daughter in her unhappiness by always taking his part and speaking well of him, an encouragement which emboldened the young lady once or twice to utter in public expressions showing that she still liked and believed in him. As she was accustomed to have her own way, and had a good deal of wit and spirit, there was at first a silent antagonism between her and her

father, who was much enraged by these manifestations of her feelings. Mr. Elkfield, however, who was accustomed to rule his household pretty absolutely, was determined that in this matter he would submit to no rebellion against his authority. Happening to notice Oakburne's card on the hall table on that evening which Beatrice had waited so long and so anxiously for his visit, he anathematized him for daring to come at all, and decided that he should call no more in future. When their guests had departed, and Beatrice had retired to her room, he addressed a curtain lecture to his wife, in which he gave the kind-hearted lady plainly to understand that he would countenance no attachment between young Oakburne and his daughter, and when he once chose to command, Mrs. Elkfield knew too well that she must obey. She and her daughter shed some tears together in private, and perhaps the latter said some harsh things and had some hard thoughts of her father, but from that day Wilfrid's name was never mentioned in the family circle. The mother, unfitted by temperament to resist her husband's strong will, speedily acquiesced in his decision; and Beatrice, who naturally found it hard to believe that her father (of whom she was very fond), would willingly speak or think ill of a man with whom he had always been friendly without just cause, and who was herself inclined to believe that her lover, had he not feared facing an explanation, could have called in time to see her, found herself daily losing faith in him, '*Les absents ont toujours tort*,' and Miss Elkfield found herself gradually growing less anxious to refute the ill opinion that the greater part of the good people of Lidfield had formed of Wilfrid, and her regard for him, though half

unknown to herself, consequently began to be seriously shaken.

It was while she was undergoing this change of feeling that the rival suitor on whom her father smiled,—or it should rather be said ‘beamed,’ so expressively did his pleasure manifest itself—began still further to encourage it by attentions which were undeniably most flattering to her. The more that Giles Rowancourt saw of the Elkfield family, and the more he recognized the attractions of Beatrice, and realized the extent of her fortune, the more did he feel convinced that his nephew could not do better than secure the hand of this provincial heiress. Once having made up his mind on this point he lost no time in impressing his views on Walter, who for his part soon showed himself well disposed to fall in with them. At first indeed he made some objection on the score of not being particularly anxious to marry just yet, and also on the ground that he imagined that Beatrice’s affections were already engaged. His uncle, however, soon overruled his faint-hearted objections. ‘My dear boy,’ said he, ‘you don’t consider this matter seriously enough. For my own part I have always felt that men ought to marry young, if they can afford it—not too young, don’t you know, but about your age; thirty, or eight and twenty is it? It steadies a man, eh? I’ve often wished I had married earlier myself. Yes upon my word, I do,’ he continued, seeing a slight smile on his nephew’s face caused by his knowledge of the history of Rowancourt’s married life. ‘I am telling you a fact though, as you are aware no doubt, my own experience of marriage was in fact not a happy one. In this case it seems to me to be your positive duty not to allow this opportunity to slip; it seems as I may say almost a gift of

providence.' Then he proceeded to enlarge on Beatrice's good looks and cleverness, on her money, and on the advantages, for a member of the boro' in having a wife with such influential connections. As for her affections being engaged it was all rubbish. A girl like that must have plenty of admirers, perhaps had had flirtations as girls will, but there was no one who had as yet actually aspired to her hand, no one whom her father, who was after all the most important personage in the matter, looked on half so favourably as he did on Walter. 'Think it over Walter my boy ; and if you are wise you'll take your old uncle's advice.' So Walter thought it over, and the more he thought of it, and the more he saw of Miss Elkfield, the better he liked the idea.

He and his uncle were staying with old Lady Thistledale, who insisted on their making her house their headquarters during their electioneering campaign, the idea of which was indeed chiefly of her own devising. The widowed marchioness was, as has been said, a great friend and ally of Giles Rowancourt, with whose family her own was distantly connected, and it was she who determined to bring forward his nephew to fight for the seat against the Conservatives, who had long held the boro' of Lidfield. She was a lady of high spirit and very strong will, ruling her household and dependents with a rod of iron, and exercising great influence in Lidfield, the inhabitants of which looked up to her as their chief grandee. A great beauty in her youth, she was still remarkably handsome, and, as everyone acknowledged, looked every inch a *grande dame*. She had been born towards the end of the previous century, remembered as a child the French Revolution, and had shone as one of the stars of the Court of the Prince Regent.

Now that the times in which she had dazzled the world had given place to a new and tamer order of things, and now that her husband—who, though perfectly her slave, had been a useful one,—had passed away, she no longer cared for the life of the court and the capital, and preferred to rule in her own territories. Her rule, as has been said, was a very autocratic one. The Boarsby family, who represented the Tory faction in the county, and were, so to speak, her rivals, boasted, it was said, a far older pedigree than her ladyship. The well known rhyme which states that—

‘ Before ever the Norman robber took England in fee,
Boarsby’s ruled in Mastdune three score years and three,’

is commonly quoted as evidence of the antiquity of their race, and there is no doubt that their place, Mastdune Castle (the name itself bears evidence to its Saxon origin) is by far the oldest residence in Hillshire, in which, as all the world knows, they have for ages enjoyed the extensive influence given them by their wealth and position. Lady Thistledale, however,—whose family, as the reader will remember, only came into notice in James I.’s reign—by no means acknowledged these claims to veneration, or if she admitted them, held that they ought to be second to her own. Hence though she took but little interest in politics, and though her disposition, mode of life, and associations, all led her to dislike the doctrines of modern liberalism, she proclaimed herself to be an ardent Whig, and when the vacancy caused by the death of Sir Joseph Boarsby gave her the opportunity she had long been hoping for, her faithful henchman, Giles Rowancourt, was at once ordered to find her a candidate. It was she who ordered her daughter-in-law, Lady Lyddlenesse, first to call on the

Elkfields, because she was told that Mr. Elkfield's influence was such as would probably secure her candidate a majority. Lady Lyddlenesse of course obeyed her as everyone else did, and, as her son, the Earl of Lyddlenesse, had obeyed when his lady mother had commanded him to marry the Countess his wife. Neither of them were remarkable for any great talent or force of character, though both were deservedly popular with all classes throughout the neighbourhood for their benevolence and kindly, unaffected manners, and they accepted the candidate whom their imperious mother was patronising, as they accepted all her wishes, without any question, and made much of the young man who, indeed, managed to make himself liked by most people. Lady Thistledale graciously consented to his coming forward directly. It had been suggested by his uncle Rowancourt, whom she liked as an agreeable, clever man who, though a good deal younger, had always professed great admiration and esteem for her. Of course she knew all about Walter and his father; but she cared nothing about old stories concerning the Chessington family history. Every family in England had had some such told of it, and in the days of the Prince Regent they were common enough. Young Chessington suited her very well. She liked him personally for his good looks, pleasant manners, and perfect submission to her orders, and, as he was able to play the part of an aspirant for political honours very tolerably, she did not trouble herself about his pedigree, and patronised him very graciously. She was also pleased to smile on the matrimonial projects which Rowancourt had formed for his nephew, and so Walter's courtship and canvass progressed together very satisfactorily.

All the electioneering business of the Liberal candidate was conducted by the firm of Portal, Quipson, and Portal, Lady Thistledale's solicitors, in whom she placed the most implicit confidence, and who, as a very old established and respectable house, did business for most of the best families in the county. Raymond Portal,—his mother fond of high-sounding names, had christened him Raymond D'Arcy Portal, and he so described himself on his cards,—the junior member of the firm, who is already well known to the reader, took the chief share in the management of affairs, and proved himself invaluable as an agent. His energy, shrewdness, and readiness, his gift of speaking, and his tact in dealing with delicate questions of remuneration to deserving voters, won the highest praise from Giles Rowancourt. The latter had never before interested himself much in the question of electioneering expenses, which his anxiety for his nephew's success now led him to do with some minuteness, and he was much taken with one or two simple little devices thus revealed to him, which, though doubtless well known to agents, had for him all the charm of novelty. He was delighted with the idea that the open accounts in favour of certain worthy voters who loved to drink success to 'Liberal Principles and Walter Chesington!' at the 'White Elephant' and 'Lyddlenesse Arms,'—accounts which the proprietors of those hosteleries had learnt from Portal that it was not unlikely he would be commissioned to defray,—would not be sent in till three months after the election, instead of within the prescribed thirty days. When Portal suggested privately to Mr. Elkfield at one of their meetings that, though *candidates* might not provide conveyances for bringing their supporters to the poll, there was nothing to prevent

a gentleman who sympathised so warmly as he did with the progress of the great "Liberal Cause" from doing such a thing out of his private means, Rowancourt, over-hearing, as he was intended to, Portal's loud whisper, showed himself most highly pleased at the idea. So he was with the cartoon which the ever-active agent designed and circulated throughout the boro', entitled, "*Driving the Boar to the Woods again,*" which represented a young horseman, attired in pig-sticking costume and armed with a spear, chasing a fat boar from a garden that he had been ravaging. The face of the animal had a most ludicrous resemblance to the Conservative candidate, Ferdinand Boarsby, the nephew of Sir Joseph Boarsby the late member, and out of its mouth were issuing the lines—

' For eighty long years I've held Lidfield in fee,
But this is the last that you'll hear of Boarsbee.'

This parody on the well-known distich relating to the family which was given above, and the cleverness of the caricature, won for the skit a decided success, which made Rowancourt declare repeatedly that young Portal was 'a first-rate agent, by Jove, and a dev'lish shrewd fellow!' It was Portal, too, who coached Walter in his part, giving him the necessary hints as to speeches, taking him to visit such influential supporters as required a personal interview, and arranging public meetings, dinners, and demonstrations of enthusiasm when Chessington drove with Lady Thistledale in her chariot and four—her ladyship was rather fond of this display of state on certain occasions—into the town. In a word he managed the business of his nephew's candidature so effectively and pleasantly, that Giles Rowan

court formed a very favourable opinion of him as a clever young lawyer, not over-burdened with scruples, who might prove useful to himself, and therefore, in a patronising way, showed him that he quite appreciated his good qualities.

Portal, however, though willing enough to be made use of, provided he was properly paid for it, and could turn the employment to his own advantage, was far too shrewd to let his services to his patrons interfere with his own schemes. He had, as the reader is aware, decided in his own mind to marry Miss Elkfield, and though it suited him to do his best to return Walter Chessington to Parliament, it was not by any means part of his programme to secure for him the hand of the heiress he had specially selected for himself. This made him view the progress of Walter's suit with anger and dismay, and led him to try and thwart it by every means in his power. He even tried to make use of Beatrice's love for Wilfrid Oakburne by suddenly posing as the advocate of the latter. That young lady, however, speedily detected the motive of his conduct, and frustrated his manoeuvre by affecting a very well simulated surprise at his remarkably sudden change of opinion, which it took all his adroitness and eloquence satisfactorily to explain. She had now decided against Wilfrid for herself, and was not to be altered in the conclusions she had come to by anything short of an explanation from him. Portal, thus driven to his last resources, now began to grow more earnest and marked in the attentions he had never ceased to play her in a quiet unobtrusive way. Hitherto he had been content to play the part of the ever constant, but quietly respectful admirer; now he began to adopt the demeanour and manners of the ardent lover. Like

all Portal undertook, this loverlike devotion on his part was very well done ; but, lacking as it did the true ring of sincerity, it made but little impression on Miss Elkfield. She had never regarded him in any other light than as a clever and agreeable acquaintance, and she had, moreover, begun secretly to distrust and dislike him because she suspected him of having prejudiced her father against Oakburne. He for his part however had grown to believe that she really cared for him, and when he realised how anxious Giles Rowancourt and Mr. Elkfield were to make a match between the young lady and Walter Chessington, he determined that he would lose no time in defeating their scheme by asking her himself to marry him.

It happened that on the morning after he had made this resolution he was called upon to visit Lady Thistledale's house on certain electioneering business which he had to discuss with Rowancourt. It had occurred to the latter that this would be a good opportunity to talk to Portal about an estate of Lord Asheleigh's in another part of Hillshire which had hitherto been very badly looked after, and the management of which he was thinking of transferring to other hands. The little matters relating to Walter's candidature having therefore been discussed, he was just about to open the subject when a message came to him from old Lady Thistledale, begging him to come to her immediately in order to discuss something of importance. The Marchioness' requests were laws which required immediate obedience, or there was no answering for the consequences. She had once refused to speak to her late husband, the Marquis, for two months, because, in releasing her from its jaws, he had strangled a favourite fox-terrier which had made its teeth meet in her hand. As she was

equally quick at taking offence with all her friends, Rowancourt was therefore obliged to ask Portal if he would mind waiting till his return, and, giving him the *Times* to amuse himself with, he left the room.

As he went out, shutting the door rather sharply, a packet of papers fell out of his pocket. Portal, who noticed them directly, was at first inclined to run after him with them, but reflecting that there was no hurry he was about to place them on the table, when the words, 'George Chessington's correspondence. Private,' written on the outer wrapper, caught his eye and made him examine the packet with some curiosity. It was merely a bundle of letters tied together by a piece of red tape. They were evidently relics of the past, for the string was faded and the superscription showed that their contents were of value at all events to their owner ; would it be worth his while to examine them ? Who was George Chessington ? Portal had taken care to inform himself of some of the main details of the Chessington family history, which were indeed no secret to anybody. What bearing had these letters, or had they any at all, on what he knew ? At all events Rowancourt, it was plain, set store by them, and therefore a knowledge of what was in them might give him perhaps some hold over him. Rowancourt and his nephew were threatening to upset his plans with regard to old Elkfield's heiress ; it would be only wise and fair to see if there was anything in the packet that could be used against them. Even if this were not so they would be more amusing reading than the *Times*. As has been said, he was not troubled with scruples of any kind, and the only question was, had he sufficient time ? He well knew that a conversation with Lady Thistledale meant, first, having to hear what her ladyship intended

to do ; then, listening to all her reasons (which were generally numerous) for doing it, and discussing each *seriatim* ; and, finally, giving an unqualified and admiring assent, which must never be expressed too abruptly, to her proposal. As she spoke slowly, and occasionally digressed a little from the main point, this process was necessarily a slow one, and, in addition to this, her boudoir was at one end of the building,—Briarsby House, a stately mansion with long lofty corridors and broad staircases, was built in the time of Charles I.,—and the little room assigned to Rowancourt as a study was at the other. Portal could easily hear anyone coming down the long passage, and came to the conclusion that he should have plenty of time. He therefore placed the chair on which he had been sitting close to the door, so that it should be knocked down by anyone who entered, and proceeded to study the packet which the reader has, of course, recognised as that discovered by Rowancourt at Otterstone Hall, with the contents of which he is already acquainted. Of these, Portal's professional habits enabled him rapidly to master the main points, and he was beginning to make a few brief notes respecting the presumption of the marriage of George Chessington to Estelle Lèon when the sound of approaching footsteps made him hastily tie up the bundle and place it on the table.

‘You dropped these papers as you left the room,’ said he, handing the packet to Rowancourt. ‘I see they are marked “Private.”’

‘Thank you! Yes, so I see. It was stupid of me,’ answered the other, taking them rather eagerly. He had often considered the advisability of destroying this obnoxious packet, but had been deterred by the fact that its existence was known to his niece and nephew, and

might be known to others through them. After all it was as safe under lock and key as anywhere else, and there was no knowing whether it might not some day prove of use in some way or other. So he had always kept it in his own possession, till this morning having occasion to have the box in which he usually kept papers of any importance repaired, he had been about to place it in another when Portal's arrival interrupted him, and led him to thrust it into his pocket. He was very glad not to have lost them, and immediately locked them up in his desk. The idea that Portal had any interest in looking at them never occurred to him, and he was moreover in high good humour, for Lady Thistledale had been informing him that she thought it would be a most excellent thing for Walter to marry Miss Elkfield, and that she intended to ask the Elkfields to dinner that week, because she considered the thing should be done without delay. Rowancourt was well pleased to find her so much of his mind in the matter, though he was a little in dread as to what course she might think it necessary to pursue best, for she was quite capable of commanding the principal parties to be united in matrimony forthwith, an arbitrary proceeding which might perhaps offend them. He said his say to Portal concerning Lord Asheleigh's estate, giving him to understand that he should require the services of Messrs. Portal, Quipson, and Portal, in the affair, and after a little general conversation, in which he was more than usually affable to the young solicitor, the latter took his leave.

'Ah! There's Walter,' said Rowancourt, as his nephew cantered past the window just as Portal was about to quit the room. 'He's been down to the Elkfields, I suppose. Great attraction there, Mr. Portal!

Eh? Charming creature Miss Beatrice, is she not? We dine with the Elkfields to-night I believe, he and I. Good day to you!’ and having seen the other depart he strolled out into the garden, much elated at the success which promised to attend his schemes. ‘Everything seems to promise well!’ said he to himself, ‘and when I see the boy in Parliament, and married to a pretty, rich young wife, I think I shall be entitled to say, that I’ve done my best for him. With her fortune and his own, if he only manœuvres properly, he may fairly hope to get a baronetcy some day, and who knows what will follow. I wish this election were over though. Its very wearing, and I’m not so much up to my work as I used to be. Well Hicks! hard at work, eh?’ and he stood awhile listening patiently to the grumbings of the old head gardener, who was superintending some arrangements which had been designed in one fashion by Lord Lyddlesse, but were now ordered to be carried out in a diametrically opposite fashion by the Marchioness his mother.

‘Her leddyship, the old lady has one mind,’ says the old fellow testily, ‘and her leddyship the young lady has another, and Lord Duncan he’s another, and the best of the lot, if they’d let ’im alone! But the leddies never can stop their meddlin’ ’bout things, what only a man understands. Never see such a house!’

Meanwhile Portal was walking rapidly towards the Elkfields’ house. Rowancourt’s remark about Walter’s finding a great attraction in Beatrice,—the manner in which it was said rather than the words,—and the news that the uncle and nephew, were to dine with the family that evening, made him all the more eager to carry out his resolve of the night before. ‘They are always dining

there,' thought he, 'and young Chessington is always hanging about the house, confound him ! 'There cannot be the slightest doubt of their game ! But I'll beat them yet ! They shall not cheat me of my prize !' and with much inward wrath and enmity against these intending robbers of spoils designed for his own use, he made his way through the ash wood above the house.

That fortune which is said to wait on the daring seemed specially to favour his enterprise, for he had hardly passed into the shadow beneath the fine old trees, when he encountered Miss Elkfield returning from a solitary walk to that very hill to which poor Wilfrid had gone, on the day when he made up his mind to set to work in earnest. There could not well be found a more suitable place for a lover's declaration than the wood on this sunny February morning, and Portal felt that if, as he believed, the young lady loved him, he had chosen the best time and place for making her confess it.

He told his tale well, pleading his patient devotion, and the ever-increasing passion which would now no longer permit him to be silent. He had been always working for this one object, and now his success in his work enabled him to offer a home to her who would ever be the dearest in the world for him, etc. etc. He artfully hinted that his jealousy was aroused by the interested fortune hunters whom he saw around her, and that he could no longer run the risk of seeing the best hope of his life snatched from him ; and then he ended with an impassioned declaration of affection, (given in his best style, the style which had often won applause at public meetings, and at the Lidfield Debating and Mutual Improvement Society), and a prayer that she would accept him as her husband.

He was no less surprised than mortified by the cool reception and chilling refusal with which his eloquent appeal was met, and for once in his life his self-possession a little forsook him. He renewed his entreaties, and attempted to take her hand, but Beatrice easily eluded him with some anger, and, with a decision in her tone that there was no mistaking, begged him to desist from trying to move her. She thanked him for his offer, but most firmly declined it, for she felt she could never care for him in the way that he wished.

This was a bitter humiliation for Portal, who had long been convinced that he was a favoured suitor. Miss Elkfield did not even seem pleased by his declaration, and was apparently no more moved by his passion than the venerable ash trees under which they were standing. Her coolness angered him, and its contrast to his ardent address made him ridiculous in his own eyes, and ashamed lest others should come to hear of his failure. He longed to reproach her with a preference for one who had better worldly advantages to offer her, for he felt sure now that Walter Chessington, with his substantial property and superior position in society, was the rival in whose favour he was rejected. His habitual prudence and self-control, however, did not desert him, and made him refrain from such rash speeches as folly.

‘At least we may still be friends,’ said he pleadingly.

‘Oh yes,’ answered she kindly, but quite quietly, ‘let us still be friends;’ and she gave him her hand.

He bowed over it, and, with a murmured ‘good-bye Beatrice,’ walked rapidly down the hill. She might have assented to the proposition that ‘the sun was shining’ with equal placidity of tone; and he felt that she cared as little for his friendship as for his love, and that she

valued neither any more than she did the cane which he carried in his hand. He had utterly failed to touch her heart, and he felt bitterly hurt, angry, and crestfallen. His love, he owned to himself, had not been deep,—he told himself that he was incapable of such a passion, and indeed rather despised it,—but he had at any rate offered her as good a love as he had to give, and it had been rejected, almost with scorn. His love had been rejected, and what was worse, far worse than that, his ambitious projects had utterly failed, and Rowancourt and his nephew would triumph over him. How he had been deceived, both in Beatrice, and in his own powers of pleasing! Yes! Chessington, and not poor Wilfrid Oakburne,—it was a comfort to think that there was some one else in the same boat,—was the fortunate man. He felt that he hated this Chessington, and his uncle, Rowancourt, and the Elkfields, all equally. Should he ever get a chance of repaying them for the ill they had done him, he would certainly not let it slip; and he went back to the office sore at heart, and chafing under his disappointment. The clerks noticed that the ‘young guv’nor’ was more than usually down on them, and speculated much among themselves that afternoon as to what had ‘put his back up.’

The interview left Beatrice hardly better pleased than it had Portal. A proposal is flattering, no doubt, but coming from a man you not only do not care for, but have even begun to dislike, it must cease to possess much charm. She had for some time, as has been said, been feeling convinced that Portal had prejudiced her father’s mind against Wilfrid as he had tried to prejudice her own, and now she thought she saw the reason. The scene recalled to her how she had met poor Wilfrid in this

wood, when she was walking there with Portal a year ago. She had laughed at him then. Perhaps she had teased and laughed at the poor fellow too much ; but she had meant well when she did it, had meant to try and rouse him to action. Well ! now he was gone for ever ! What was the good of thinking of him ! Perhaps he was guilty after all ! She could hardly believe it, but still, how could she know ? No ! there was no good thinking of him any more. She was wearied of love and courtship which, as she well knew, was undertaken partly, in some cases indeed entirely, for her fortune. Plenty of other suitors were in the field besides Portal and Chessington, and she was quite tired of such attentions. Young Snipington of Marshmire Park was now perpetually riding over on all sorts of pretexts, and his sisters were always asking her to go to luncheon ; Captain Bolderwood too was always dropping in and had begun to make himself most acceptable to her mother by the interest he took in her garden, and the valuable hints he gave her as to ‘bedding out,’ ‘potting’ and ‘grafting,’ etc. Then there were not a few less eligible aspirants like Mr. Lecten, the senior curate, and Dr. Dosey, a widower with four children, who had succeeded Wilfrid’s father in the best practice in Lidfield. She was beginning almost to hate them all, and to feel that this kind of life was a burden. As she walked homewards through the wood she said to herself that she could bear it no longer. Wilfrid was lost to her ; even if his character was cleared her parents would never let her marry him. And here was Walter Chessington, handsome, rich, and well born, longing to offer her a position which surely ought to be a pleasurable one, and which she had an ambition to fill. As the wife of the member for the boro’, she would be equal with or even

superior to many who were now patronisingly kind to her, and in Clayshire, as well as in Hillshire, she would take a first rank among the great ladies of the county. She was ambitious, and the idea of being a leader in society had great charms for her. Then the delights of the London season, and dim visions of social successes in the great capital, floated before her mind. Besides, she would delight her parents, and, at the same time, free herself from the persecutions of matrimonial adventurers like the man she had just refused. At all events, Walter Chessington, who had so much money of his own, could not, she thought, be marrying her solely for her fortune. He was not quite her ideal of a husband, which, like that of many other young ladies, was a very high one ;—but ideals, as she owned herself with a sigh, are not often realised in this prosaic world. Yes, it must come to that! ‘Poor Wilfrid!’ she thought, ‘you were very generous, and honest, and true, and loved me very dearly! Why were you so poor? Dear old playfellow! you and and I must forget each other!’ She reached home weary and sad, but with a heart suddenly grown much harder. She had had enough of such wooers as Portal.


So it came about that when Walter Chessington dined at Ashdene that evening she was very kind to him, and sung the songs he admired with unusual skill and pathos. Finally, when he asked her to marry him the next morning she consented with a very good grace, and there was consequently much rejoicing in the houses of Elkfield and of Thistledale.

CHAPTER XIX.

A morning ride among the hills.

OVER clover wet with dew,
Whence the skylark startled, flew,
Through brown fallows, where the hare
Leapt up from its subtle lair,
Past the mill-stream and the reeds
Where the stately heron feeds,
By the warren's sunny wall,
Where the dry leaves shake and fall,
By the hall's ancestral trees,
Bent and writhing in the breeze,
Rode we.

—GEORGE W. THORNBURY.

 NE fine, still morning at the beginning of March, some three weeks after their engagement, and a couple of days before the poll which would decide the fate of the election, Walter Chessington and Miss Elkfield set out to ride to Rolhill, a village in the neighbouring county, some seven or eight miles distant from Lidfield, where there was an ancient encampment and a curious old church, both of which were generally acknowledged to be well worth visiting. Old Elkfield came out as the horses were brought round, and watched the pair start with the greatest satisfaction. He was overjoyed at the match, and the cup of his delight had been filled to the brim by the fact that, some ten days after the happy arrangement had been come to, Walter's

uncle, through the death of his father,—‘Henry Giles Vernon Rowancourt, Tenth Earl of Ashleigh, K.G., K.T., F.R.S., etc., etc., etc.,’ titles which Elkfield read with much unction to his wife,—had succeeded to the earldom. Beatrice would soon be the niece by marriage of a peer! What better reward could have come to this shrewd, hard-working, British capitalist? How he enjoyed talking of ‘my future connection with the Earl of Ashleigh,’ and with what solemn gravity he ‘deplored the sad event that has called Lord Ashleigh away at this anxious time of the election!’

‘They make a pretty couple, my dear, eh?’ said he, rubbing his hands with gleeful satisfaction as he entered the drawing-room after their departure. ‘He’s a fine young fellow is Chessington! And you wanted to marry Miss Trix to that worthless chap, young Oakburne! What’d you do without me, Polly, eh?’ and he gave her a rough but good-natured caress.

Meanwhile the ‘pretty couple’ were riding along, well pleased with each other, and in high spirits at the brightness and beauty of all around them. Walter was most devoted and attentive, and Beatrice felt, for the time at least, well satisfied with her choice.

‘So you are pretty confident of victory on Thursday, Walter,’ said the lady. ‘Your eloquence has secured the right number of voters; your “unanswerable arguments,” is not that the word, have convinced every one.’

Walter laughed. ‘Neither eloquence nor arguments have anything to do with the matter, my dear Beatrice, as it is time you should know. The only argument an Englishman understands is self-interest, I verily believe;—and of course that is the best argument. What right has an elector to care about abstract principles? He

wants his representative to represent his interests. It sounds horribly low, but I am afraid it is the truth. Of course bribery is a shocking thing in the abstract, and I highly disapprove of it, but I am beginning to believe that it is the only sort of reasoning that the bulk of English electors have ever understood, or will ever understand.'

'I didn't know you were so wicked, so sordid in your views of your fellow creatures!' said Beatrice, I shant talk any more about such nasty subjects as bribery. If you win that is all I care about, and I choose to set it down to your good speaking. Let us have a canter!' and they gave their horses a breather over the soft elastic turf of the down.

'This is the Waste—Rolhill Waste,' said Miss Elkfield, as they reined in their steeds. 'That is the encampment on that hill over there, and there is the village.'

'What, a village! it appears to consist of a church and one house. I call this an imposture, Beatrice!'

'There are some dozen more cottages down below at the foot of the hill, and I believe two or three on the other side of the encampment. It's a scattered parish. Isn't it a funny place to build a church?'

'Yes,' answered Walter, 'I suppose, as it is so old, "some hermit good" built it here to be out of the way. We are out of Hillshire now, arent we?'

'No, Walter: We were when we began our gallop, but now we are in Hillshire again. If you look at the map you'll see that just this little piece—Rolhill Waste and Rolhill village—are marked "part of Hillshire," though I can't tell you why. I must tell you a story about the "Waste," Walter!'

'Part of Hillshire,' replied Walter. 'That's an odd

arrangement ! but I believe it exists in a good many counties. Well, what is your story ? I am all attention.'

'It's only this. A man who lived in one of those cottages, more than a hundred years ago, was digging a ditch round it one day, when he came on a large coronet of gold, set with diamonds, big enough for an ordinary head.'

'Happy man !' says Walter. 'And what did he do with it ? Took it to the pawnbroker's, eh ? or wore it to go to church in ?'

'Don't be silly, sir. It's all quite true, and I call it very remarkable. He, knowing nothing of its value, took it to a goldsmith at Gloucester, who gave him £31 for it.'

'When he probably got horribly drunk, and beat his wife.'

'Don't interrupt. There is very little wife-beating in *this* neighbourhood, I can tell you ! Well, the Gloucester jeweller sold it to a London jeweller for £250 ; and the London jeweller sold it for—how much do you think ?'

'I haven't any idea, Beatrice.'

'He sold it for £1500. That is a fact. What do you think of that ! Isn't it curious ? It must have belonged to some Royal personage ? Don't you think so ? The man who found it was the grandfather of the owner of the inn where we are going to leave the horses while I show you the church. You must see it ; I insist, Walter. It is very old and quaint, and it won't take long.'

"Caius Whitworth, licensed to sell beer, spirits, and tobacco," read out Walter as they halted in front of the inn door, over which was a board proclaiming these facts, while a sign on a post in front announced that the hostelry was the 'Blue Boar's Head.'

'Caius Whitworth ! what a quaint name ! He must

be a descendant of some of the ancient Romans who made the encampment yonder, and who got left behind by mistake. No doubt we shall find some traces of Balbus next! What a queer place for an inn, too! at the top of the hill and close to the church!’

‘Here he comes,’ said Beatrice, pointing to a man who was approaching them from a field at the back of the house. ‘He is a yeoman farmer. It doesn’t look very much of a farm though, does it? But he is of a very old and respectable family, and his ancestors first settled here a hundred and fifty years and more ago. One of this man’s uncles used to be called the “parson’s parson.”’

‘Parson’s parson! Really Beatrice you have brought me to a very remarkable place. Inns stand alone on the top of hills, close to churches which have no one to go to them. The inhabitants are ancient Romans turned farmers and publicans, and some of them follow the profession of parson’s parsons. What on earth is a parson’s parson?’

‘Hush, Walter,’ answered the young lady. ‘It was only because he was village schoolmaster, and clerk, and helped the clergyman in his work a good deal. Good morning, Mr. Whitworth! we want to put our horses up please, while we look at the church.’

The landlord, a fine looking, healthy man, of sixty or so, with a grizzled bent head, and rather a sad expression, saluted Miss Elkfield with a pleasant smile of recognition, and took their horses, telling them that the key was in the church door, as the ‘young woman was a cleaning of it out.’

‘This is the high road over the downs into Hillshire,’ said Beatrice, as they walked towards the church, ‘and so far more people pass this way than you’d imagine,

Mr. Walter. And as for the church having no one to go to it, it is very well filled on Sundays. There is the village down there.'

'What a lovely view!' said Walter, as they paused at the entrance of the churchyard. 'It is certainly worth riding here to see it alone.'

'Oh! It is satisfactory to hear you graciously condescend to admire something, after all your uncomplimentary remarks!' answered Beatrice, laughing. 'Yes, it is very beautiful!'

From the high ridge they were on they looked down on the one side at Hillshire, with its ranges of undulating wooded hills, bounded in the far background by the mountains of Mid Wales, and on the other on the broad fertile expanse of the neighbouring county,—a great plain, stretching away to the far horizon, with rich meadow lands and orchards, and many a stately mansion and substantial homestead half seen amongst its parks and copses.

'Now let us look at the church,' said Beatrice, after they had gazed for a moment in silence at the fair prospect before them. 'The clergyman who does duty here lives three miles away in the other county, and only comes here every other Sunday.'

The little church was more remarkable for the antiquity than the beauty of its architecture. Beatrice pointed out that a considerable portion of the tower was built with the flat bricks used by the Romans, and she told him how the latter, as well as the Saxons and Normans, had—as is not unfrequently found in the churches of our island—all left the impress of their styles on the building.

'So you own that it *is* interesting and worth coming

to see. That's a great compliment from a gentleman who has seen so much celebrated architecture on the Continent,' said Beatrice, as they entered the church, at the far end of which, near the altar, a woman, whose back was turned towards them, was engaged in the process of 'cleaning.'

'Ah! there's a great deal abroad that will please you immensely, Beatrice; though I own that we don't know half enough of our own country. Wait till I show you St. Peter's and all the sights of Rome, and Venice, Naples, and Paris! How you will enjoy them all!'

'Pleasures to come,' says Miss Elkfield, with a little laugh. 'Meantime, there are one or two curious monuments here. Look at that crusader!' and she pointed to a full length recumbent statue of an early Christian champion, whose nose, and the end of whose sword, had been chopped off by some wanton iconoclast. 'That is Sir Hugo de Boarsby, an ancestor of your opponent Ferdinand Boarsby, who did wonderful things in Palestine. And read this. It is to the memory of a royalist leader who defended Rolhill Tower which used to stand on the Hillshire side of the hill about a mile away, against the Roundheads, and was killed there with all his men. It was King Charles's last stronghold in this part of the country.'

Walter read out with some difficulty the inscription on a brass cross let into one of the massive pillars in the centre of the building.

'Praye for y^e soule of Sir Rupert de Bolderwoode, the which decessed the v day of Aprill the yere of oure Lord God a thousand DCXLVII and on whose soule Jehu have mercy. Amen.'

'How quaint! what queer old spelling! and what a

lot of figures ! I suppose that is some ancestor of Captain Bolderwood of Slopley.'

'Yes !' answered Beatrice, with a little blush. She did not think it necessary to tell him that Sir Rupert was also, as the reader knows, a maternal ancestor of Wilfrid Oakburne's.

'There is one more I want to show you close to the altar,' continued she, as they walked up the aisle. 'It is to a clergyman who was once rector of Lidfield, and master of the Hospital. He left directions in his will that he should be buried here. He was an ancestor of my mother's, Dr. Thornton.'

'Thornton ! That's the same name as Lady Thistle-dale's family,' says Walter.

'Yes. He was a younger brother of the man who was made Earl of Lyddlenesse. You didn't know I was so respectable, did you ? But the younger branch never prospered like the other did, and they of course, therefore, did not care to keep up the connection much. There's the tablet at your feet. Read it to me.'

*'Sub pedibus Doctor Jacet hic in legibus Thornton
Esse pios docuit, quodque, docebat erat, &c. &c. &c.'*

repeats Walter obediently, reading a somewhat lengthy Latin inscription.

'Yes that is it ! Isn't it nice ? Now listen to the English translation, which I know by heart :—

*'Here lies Dr. Thornton underfoot,
Who was what he taught men to be, pious and good—'*

She stopped abruptly at this point, for the woman who had been sweeping near to them started as she heard her voice, dropped her broom, and turned towards her a frightened face, which made Miss Elkfield when she saw

it pause with a sudden exclamation of surprise. Walter, who had been listening to his betrothed with lover-like attention, was equally startled ; but he was still more astonished when the woman, leaving her broom and dust-pan, hurried precipitately from the church.

‘It *is* Lois Simcox!’ cried Beatrice, whose face had grown a shade paler, gazing after her retreating figure.

‘And who the—who on earth may she be?’ asked Walter. ‘Another Rolhill curiosity? Anything to do with Caius Whathisname or the parson’s parson? What is the matter, Beatrice? you look quite scared!’

‘Oh! Walter! I must see her! Oh it is so sad! come back at once with me to the inn. She must be living there. Do you mind coming? I will tell you afterwards.’

‘Of course I’ll come!’ replied he, still feeling very bewildered.

‘Oh thank you! Let us go at once. We have seen everything now, and I am so afraid I may miss her!’ and they walked quickly back to the ‘Blue Boar’s Head.’

‘You must wait here, Walter, while I try and find out Lois, and talk to her,’ said Beatrice, who was evidently much excited.

‘I suppose I ought to get something for the good of the house,’ answered her lover, who was now rather disposed to be amused at the occurrence. ‘What shall it be? spirits or tobacco? which do you recommend, Beatrice?’

But Beatrice was not at all inclined to joke, and suddenly descriing in the little garden at the back a glimpse of the dress of her she was in search of, she

darted into the house, leaving Walter at the door in a state of greater perplexity than ever.

Lois Simcox, for she indeed it was, had not imagined that Miss Elkfield would think of following her, and was taken completely by surprise when she heard the latter call her by name. She had thought that the scorn and angry abhorrence with which virtuous women are apt to regard those who have fallen, would not only deter Beatrice from such a course, but also lead her to shun her. Relying on this she had sought the refuge of the garden till these, to her, unwelcome visitors should have departed, and the risk of another meeting would be over. Anger, timidity, and shame, were blended together in her pale, sad face, as she turned defiantly on Beatrice and asked almost fiercely—

‘What do you want with me? How dare you follow me thus?’

‘Lois!’ cried the other, as she held out her hand to her, ‘Do you think I want anything but to do you good? Why should you fear me?’

The two had known each other since childhood. Mr. Simcox’s cottage was not far from the Elkfield’s house, and Mrs. Elkfield, always good to the poor and suffering around her, had been especially kind to his wife during her last illness, and, after her death, to his little motherless girl then between five and six years old. She had had Lois constantly up to her house where she naturally saw a great deal of Beatrice, and the intercourse thus began,—though as time went on it became as was inevitable less frequent,—was as far as possible continued when the two grew to womanhood. Hence the strong bonds of mutual liking and esteem combined with her sympathy for her father’s great sorrow, and with her

earnest desire to know that Wilfrid Oakburne was innocent of the cruel charge brought against him, to make Miss Elkfield forget any squeamish repugnance she might otherwise have felt at addressing the school-master's daughter.

The kindness of her greeting, which was so different from that which she had anticipated, touched poor Lois deeply, and changed her angry defiance to a sudden outburst of bitter grief.

'No, no! never now!' cried she, turning away from the hand extended to her, 'I cannot! I cannot!' and she covered her face and wept in silence.

Beatrice soothed her with kind words and womanly consolation. 'You must not treat me thus, Lois,' said she. 'Am I not your friend?'

'God bless you!' sobbed the poor girl, and then, as she grew calmer, she was induced little by little to tell her all. How she had fled to London; how she had tried to maintain herself there by the stage and by needlework; of the persecutions of the manager of the Momus Theatre; of her privations and sufferings, and of the rough kindness of her landlady, Mrs. Skibbers. How at length, when her baby died, she had fled from London, as from a place which she said was full of evil, to this lonely refuge. Mr. Whitworth had married a sister of her father's, and it was on the pretext, as the reader has been already told, of visiting her that Lois had first left her home. When she resolved to quit London she had, after much inward struggle, forced herself to appeal to the pity of her uncle and aunt; and when, after having made her journey for the most part on foot, she reached them weary, and heart-broken with shame and grief, she found that she had not reckoned without good reason

on their kindly affection. They received her with open arms and unfeigned gladness, and never did she hear one word of reproach from their lips. Childless themselves, they had always looked on her almost as a daughter, and when she came to them in her sorrow, they gave her such a welcome as touched her to the heart. Here she had lived for the last six weeks, helping them in household matters, and discharging the duties of caretaker in the church in which Mr. Whitworth,—as his father and his uncle, ‘the parson’s parson,’ had done before him,—officiated on Sundays as clerk. Save occasional strangers who travelled over the hills from one county to the other, and the clergyman who baited his horse at the inn every other Sunday, the Whitworths saw hardly anyone. Lois felt that here she was unknown, and secured from the scorn of those who were acquainted with the story of her sin and shame. It was a haven of peace after the storm, and she rested there in thankful content. In one thing, and one only, had she pained her uncle and aunt, and that was by her refusal to see her father. She could not bring herself to face him, and when they tried to persuade her to go to him, or write to him, or allow them to bring him to her, she had begged them with such painful eagerness to desist from their efforts, and shewn signs of such alarming mental distress, that they had agreed at last to let the matter alone, for the time at least. She was so strongly convinced of her father’s horror for her sin, and felt so keenly for his wounded pride and bitter sorrow, that she dared not meet him.

On this point Beatrice was rewarded with success where Mrs. Whitworth and her husband had failed. She drew such a touching picture of the schoolmaster’s grief,

of the illness which had prostrated him on his first hearing of his trouble, and of the effect which constant anxiety was having on his mind and body, that his daughter's heart smote her. Beatrice had seen him and talked to him so often of late, that she was able to appeal more directly to her feelings than Lois' uncle or aunt could do; for the latter, owing to a want of sympathy of tastes, had had but an occasional and constrained intercourse with him for many years. He had rather opposed his sister's marriage to Whitworth, and the pair had never quite forgiven him, so that their distance from each other was accepted by each as a sufficient excuse for the rarity of the visits which they exchanged. Thus it happened that Beatrice's earnest advocacy at last triumphed over Lois' sensitive reluctance, and won from her a consent to allow Miss Elkfield to tell the schoolmaster how she had found his daughter, and that she besought him to visit her.

'Perhaps he will not come, Miss Elkfield,' said poor Lois. 'It is I who ought to go to him. But I dare not! oh I dare not!'

'I am sure he will come to you,' said Beatrice, who sympathised with the poor thing's reluctance to visit her native place, and felt that for every reason it would be better that Mr. Simcox should go to Rolhill. 'Trust me Lois, all will be made happy now,' and with renewed expressions of goodwill she prepared to go. She could not bring herself to do so, however, without making an effort to learn Wilfrid's innocence.

'Do you know,' said she with a deep blush, 'that Wilfrid Oakburne is pointed at in the streets of Lidfield as having ruined you?'

'Wilfrid Oakburne! the man who saved my life! It

is false, utterly false, Miss Elkfield!’ cried Lois aghast. ‘He saved me from death; from worse, from crime! Mind you tell this to no one! I was so wretched that I tried to make away with myself; and he saved me. Swear you will not tell my father!’

‘Good heavens! poor Lois!’ cried Beatrice with a shudder. ‘But I promise most solemnly to keep your secret. Then he is guiltless!’

‘Guiltless! Yes! He has been generous and honourable in all his conduct to me! It was I who was wicked and foolish! Oh why am I born to bring sorrow on those whom I love!—on those who have been so good to me!’

‘I am very glad to hear this,’ said Beatrice with a sudden rush of mingled feelings,—of joy that Wilfrid was innocent, of sorrow that his supposed guilt had separated him from her for ever, and of a slight pang of jealousy because she saw that Lois loved him and wondered whether, even though he was innocent, he did not return the feeling.

‘Take comfort, dear Lois!’ said she. ‘After all it was not your fault that men accused him falsely. Remember your father will come to you to-morrow, I hope!’

‘Yes, to-morrow!’ replied Lois. ‘God bless you, Miss Elkfield, for all your goodness to me!’ and, moved by a sudden impulse, she seized Beatrice’s hand and pressed it with a sob to her lips; and then the latter, with a full heart that showed itself in her eyes, rejoined her lover, whom she found talking with Mr. Whitworth, who was holding the horses.

‘I hope your interview has been satisfactory, Beatrice,’ said Chessington as they rode homewards, after bidding the landlord good day. ‘I have been very patient. I

have drunk some wonderful ale for the good of the house, and discussed agriculture and farming prospects in all their bearings with old Caius Whitworth.'

'I kept you a long time I know,' replied she; 'and, as you have been so good, I'll reward you by telling why I behaved in this extraordinary way.' And then she told him as much as it was possible for her to do of poor Lois' story, and how she hoped now to restore her to her father.

Walter listened with great interest. He had been in his heart rather inclined to set down Beatrice as a little spoiled and selfish, but this incident showed her in quite a new light, which surprised and delighted him. 'Poor thing!' cried he. What a sad story! But I'm glad I heard it for one reason.'

'Glad! How can you be glad?'

'Because it teaches me something about Beatrice Elkfield I had not yet learned, I am ashamed to say. I see that after all *I* am like the man who found the treasure on Rolhill Waste, and know nothing of its real value. This poor Lois has opened my eyes a little. - It is very, very good of you, dear!'

'Nonsense!' said Beatrice.

They had now reached the ash wood above the Elkfield's house, and just as Walter opened the gate that led into it from the down, a man who had been sitting on a fallen trunk close by, which was half hidden from them by the stems of the trees, suddenly rose to his feet. His movement frightened Walter's horse, which, shying violently, reared up, and its feet slipping on the precipitous bank would inevitably have fallen back and crushed him had not the stranger, who was the unconscious cause of the accident, rushed forward and caught

the reins, thus enabling the animal to regain the road with a scramble. The whole thing occupied but a few minutes, and in the confusion Chessington did not at first recognise the man who had come to his rescue.

‘I am extremely obliged to you, sir!’ said he; ‘you have saved me from a nasty fall, perhaps worse.’

The other was still holding the horse, now perfectly quiet. He started on hearing the voice, and looked at the speaker in some surprise.

‘I am very pleased to have been of use, Mr. Chessington,’ replied he, flushing. ‘I fear the accident was partly my fault, for I startled your horse. You do not recognise me I see. My name is Oakburne. I had the pleasure of meeting you in London. Can I be of any further assistance? No. Then I’ll wish you good morning. Good-bye, Miss Elkfield!’ and raising his hat to Beatrice he walked rapidly through the wood.

Miss Elkfield, after a little scream for help, had sat a trembling and silent spectator of the scene, and had had some difficulty in managing her own mare, which had become very restive. She had recognised Wilfrid directly he ran forward to assist Chessington. How pale and ill he looked, poor fellow! But she contented herself with giving him a frigid little bow. Was it not his place to come forward. At all events he might have had the grace to congratulate her,—if he knew. But of course he knew!

‘That was the man who saved poor Lois Simcox from drowning,’ said she to Walter as they made their way slowly to the house.

‘Isn’t he a doctor, or something of that kind? I think I have heard of him before,’ said Chessington, looking up at her rather keenly and with a mischievous smile.

He had somehow learnt that Wilfrid was the rival for whom, as he had told his uncle, he had suspected Beatrice of having a *tendresse* when Rowancourt had first suggested that he should pay his attentions to her.

‘Yes! He is studying medicine. He used to be a great admirer of mine, if that is what you mean!’ answered the young lady carelessly, but nevertheless blushing a little. ‘Are you jealous of him, Walter?’

‘No! I don’t think I am!’ says he, looking earnestly into her frank eyes. ‘No! I’m not. Poor fellow! Of course he couldn’t help being a great admirer after all.’

‘Rubbish!’ cried Beatrice. ‘Well, you need not be jealous!’

‘I don’t intend to be, madam. Soh! Soh! Steady, old fellow!’ to the horse which for a minute showed signs of refractoriness. ‘No! I don’t intend to be. I really feel very grateful to this man Oakburne, I assure you Beatrice. He certainly saved me from a very ugly fall. Oddly enough, too, I have come across him twice before, and have to thank him for another little service he has been doing for me.’ And when they had entered the house he told Beatrice where and how he and Wilfrid had met, which led him to speak of Hoffbauer and to tell her all about his connection with him also.

CHAPTER XX.

A Wiping off of old Scores.

‘In civilised society, personal merit will not serve you so much as money will. Sir, you may make the experiment. Go into the street, and give one man a lecture on morality, and another a shilling, and see which will respect you most.’

—BOSWELL’S JOHNSON.

‘SWEET is true love tho’ given in vain, in vain ;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

.
I fain would follow love, if that could be ;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me ;
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.’

—TENNYSON.

THOUGH, as has been stated before in these pages, Lidfield may perhaps appear to be rather a dull town on ordinary occasions, no one would have called it so who had seen it during an election thirty years ago. Party feelings always ran high at such times, and the electors or those who acted in their name were in the habit of relieving their pent-up feelings by demonstrations which sometimes led to acts of violence, not to say ferocity. The river Lidd offered a dangerous means of testifying their disfavour by ducking any unfortunate victim who had made himself obnoxious to either party. ‘Down the river with

him,' was the cry on such occasions ; and, 'Chessington for ever—Boarsby down the river!' or, *vice versa*, was the phrase by which each party showed its convictions to the other. Colours were freely sported in those days, and the wearer of those of either candidate had to be prepared for rude chaff and perhaps rough usage if he happened to meet with a body of his opponent's supporters. The town was, in short, given over for a season to the more unruly portion of its inhabitants, who, by their boisterous behaviour at public meetings, and noisy processions led by brass bands and composed of mobs equally ready to shout, fight, or break windows, drove all ladies and lovers of peace and quiet to keep as much indoors as possible.

Owing to various reasons there had been a delay in issuing a writ to the 'faithful burgesses of Lidfield,' and Parliament had already been sitting over a month before the holding of the poll which was to decide whether 'Walter Chessington, Esq., J.P., of Otterstone Hall, in the County of Clayshire,' or 'Ferdinand Boarsby, Esq., D.C.L.; F.R.S.; F.R.G.S.; etc.; of Little Drove House, Mastdune, in the County of Hillshire,' should represent the borough. The facts, that there had been no now contest for twelve years, that the Liberals had always hitherto failed in their efforts to carry the seat, and also that the feelings of the whole nation were at that time in rather a highly wrought state owing to the impending war, all united to make the excitement and interest in this particular election stronger than usual. The Queen's Speech had announced many important measures. We were going to reform our representative system, and the manner of trying disputed elections ; to remodel our Parliamentary

oaths, and alter the principle of appointing candidates for the civil service ; besides changing the law of removal and settlement, and the constitution of the governing body of Oxford University, etc. etc. etc. But this extensive programme of domestic legislation was quite thrown into the shade by the demand made by the royal message for an increase of the naval and military forces, with a view to give effect to the impending negotiations. It was pretty patent to everyone that France and England were about to embark in a war which was almost universally believed to be 'righteous' because such conscientious men as Lord Aberdeen and Mr. Gladstone were consenting to it, because Lord Palmerston, the most energetic and popular member of the Cabinet, advocated it, and because it must be right to assist 'the down-trodden race of Othman' against the 'Muscovite despot' who, even though he might not be the cause, as Mr. Urquhart affirmed, of absolutely all the evils which befall mankind, was certainly an 'unprincipled and tyrannous oppressor.'

The liberal candidate for Lidfield had therefore a strong claim to the support of the electors in the fact that he had pledged himself to support the ministry which was about to undertake this 'righteous' and popular war ; and he further commended himself to them by the personal advantages of a prepossessing appearance, a straightforward and pleasant manner, and a ready address. As regarded the principles he represented, and mere externals, he was therefore decidedly the popular candidate, since Ferdinand Boarsby, though he was, to tell the truth, a far more gifted individual than Walter,—having gained allsorts of honours at college, travelled in the most distant parts of the world, and made himself a reputa-

tion as an active member of several learned societies,—was hesitating in speech and insignificant in person. He was moreover, as in duty bound, a denouncer of the Aberdeen Ministry, and hence the respect and liking felt for him personally, and the influence of his brother Sir Peter Boarsby, the present owner of Mastdune Castle, were counterbalanced by his defective oratory, and the then unpopularity of his party. Notwithstanding this however, there is no doubt that he would have headed the poll had not the unusually strong advocacy of Lady Thistledale, and the great wealth of Mr. Elkfield been thrown into the opposite scale. Had the late Marquis indeed been alive, the Thistledale support would have been almost useless on account of his unpopularity with his tenantry through his harshness and niggardliness, which contrasted most unfavourably with the generous treatment of the Boarsby family to all their dependents. Lady Thistledale however had wisely begun to turn over a new leaf after his decease, and had been so ably seconded in her efforts by her son and daughter-in-law as completely to change the opinions of those around her from strong dislike to great esteem for herself and the members of her family. It was, however, Joseph Elkfield's great influence among the traders of Lidfield, and the generous way in which he spent his money for the good of the town and the benefit of the liberal cause, that really made weight against the old, established, aristocratic sway of the rival House of Boarsby. It is to be feared that Walter was right in the main in what he had said to his *fiancée* about the necessity of appealing to the interests rather than the principles of the electors. Education had not then had the chance of effecting those immense improvements which we hope it is

now doing in the culture and morality of the more plebeian part of the nation, and perhaps there was more excuse thirty years ago than now for doubting whether a vote, in spite of all the stringent enactments to the contrary, will not always be regarded as a marketable article by the electors of this much denounced 'nation of shopkeepers.' Of course the election now being described was conducted on the very purest of principles, and both the candidates were equally vehement in their denunciation and dislike of bribery, and perhaps, after all, it was merely an odd coincidence that the most votes were eventually found to have been given on the side of the party which had most money at its command.

The appeals made in public to their constituents on this interesting occasion by the two candidates were in no way different from those usual in such cases. While Walter Chessington called on them to give their votes 'in support of *those glorious principles of liberty* which have made England the *temple of freedom* for the whole world, and the leader in the great *march of progress* among the nations of the earth,' Ferdinand Boarsby implored them 'to rally round the *Church* and the *Throne*, and to preserve from the subversion of ignorant and unprincipled Radicals that *glorious constitution* which was the *pride* of England and the *envy* of the world, by returning as their representative a staunch Conservative who could at least boast that he came of a stock whose members had ever been found striving for the interests of Lidfield, of Hillshire, and of England, since English history began.' There was the usual number of rival skits and lampoons, the usual quantity of cleverly managed corruption, and the usual amount of drunkenness and breaking of heads ;—in short, this parliamentary contest

differed little from any other, and the attention of the reader is only drawn to it in order that he may be told of an event which occurred during the poll, and which, though it in no way influenced the result of the election, materially affected the interests of Wilfrid Oakburne and other personages in this history.

Two reasons had induced Wilfrid to visit Lidfield at this particular period. In the first place overwork, acting on the despondent state of mind to which his anxieties with regard to Lois, and the unexpected news of Miss Elkfield's engagement had given rise, had so evidently affected his health that both his tutor Dr. Block and his friend Mr. Throckmorton had recommended him to take a little rest previous to his examinations for the prize medal and the degree of M.D. In the second he was anxious to get home on account of certain tidings he had heard of Lois Simcox.

For some time after his interview with Mrs. Skibbers he had been content to wait in the hope of hearing from her some news respecting Lois, and only once had he been led to renew his attempts to discover where she was. It was one evening towards the end of February when Norton, who was strongly bitten with the prevailing war fever, suggested that they should go and witness the departure of the Guards for Southampton, which was to take place early the following morning. Wilfrid agreed without much opposition, feeling, as his friend said, that a little idleness would do him good, but chiefly because he was glad to humour the latter, who always shewed a great deal of kindness and good nature to himself. So the pair left Poulford Street between half-past three and four in the morning, and made their way to Trafalgar Square. They found a crowd of several thousand people,

many of whom had taken their stations there long before, watching with quiet expectation the entrance to the St. George's Barracks, which lie behind the National Gallery. The vast concourse which awaited with wonderful patience the coming of the troops, the gloom of the Barrack Square, lightened every now and then by the gleam of a bayonet, and the silence, which was broken by nothing save the measured tones of the clock of the neighbouring church proclaiming the flight of the hours, all made the scene a very impressive one. At last, as the first pale light of daybreak appeared in the sky, the crowd, weary of the prolonged delay, began to show their impatience, and at the same time their loyalty, by singing the National Anthem. Begun by a few voices, the grand old air was gradually taken up by the whole crowd till the familiar strains pealed forth from a thousand tongues. Then 'Rule Britannia' was chanted with equal vigour, and, as the last notes of the chorus were ringing in the air and mingling with the deep bell from the tower which told it was five o'clock, the long enduring spectators were at last rewarded, and the band of the regiment marched out from the gateway and took up its position in the Strand below. The cheer that greeted them had hardly died away when the men, in their tall bearskins and grey great-coats, came trooping forth pell-mell, and rushed without order down to where the band were stationed; and then the whole regiment, having formed up, marched down the Strand to Wellington Street, and thence over Waterloo Bridge to the South-Western Railway Station. The gallant body of men, the martial music, the incessant cheering and wild but hearty choruses of the crowd as they took up some favourite tune, the strange figures

which, suddenly roused from sleep, rushed to the windows waving handkerchiefs, shirts, or any other article of apparel they could lay hold of, and shouting their farewells, all made up a spectacle so wild and so stirring that Oakburne and Norton were fairly carried away by the common enthusiasm, and marched along cheering and singing with the rest.

Suddenly Wilfrid grasped his friend's shoulder. 'Heavens! Norton, there she is!' cried he.

'Who is?' replied the other. 'Where is she?'

'Lois Simcox, my good fellow! There! don't you see?' and he pointed to a meanly-clad woman who was being hurried along with the crowd some ten paces ahead of them.

'My dear Oakburne, how can you tell at this distance and with the woman's back turned towards you?' cried Norton, who did not relish this interruption to their adventure.

'That's just how I *can* tell,' replied Wilfrid. 'I must follow her.'

'All right; if you must,' said Norton, with his usual good nature. 'But I warn you its no use!' and they pressed forward as fast as they could. The dense crowd, however, prevented their getting any nearer till they had got over Waterloo Bridge, when as they reached the York Road a good many of those who had been following turned off and left the main body which continued to accompany the regiment to the station.

'Hurrah! There she goes!' cried Wilfrid, as the woman they were pursuing turned aside and walked rapidly in the direction of Blackfriar's Bridge. 'Come, quicken up!'

'Is this a walking race?' panted Norton, as they

hurried after the woman, who had got a very fair start of them. 'I say, I am not in training; this pace is killing!'

'Come on!' cried Wilfrid fiercely. '*I must* catch her!'

He was convinced it was Lois; the shape of the head, the hair, the height, the walk, were all her's exactly. At last he had found her!

On they hurried down the long street which looked more than usually unsightly in the dreary light of the dull morning. Slowly, but surely, they gained upon the woman. 'It *is* Lois!' said Wilfrid triumphantly, as she half turned her head.

'It may be Lois,' replied Norton. 'But this kind of thing cannot continue much longer. I faint! I die!'

'Come on!' repeated Wilfrid. 'See! she has turned up there,' and they followed her up a long dirty alley, and then, turning sharply down another lane which was if possible still more dirty, found themselves in a little court of rickety, dingy-looking dwellings, at the door of one of which the woman stopped breathless.

'What a rookery!' cried Norton, who was bringing up the rear. 'I am glad I left my watch at home!'

'Lois!' cried Wilfrid, going eagerly up to her, and quite regardless of the surroundings. 'Lois! I have found you at last!'

'Who the —— are you?' cried the young woman, turning sharply on him. 'What do you mean by calling me names. I'll Lois you! Are you detectives or what? I aint done nothing that I'll take my solemn davy.'

Alas! it was not Lois, but a pale, wretched outcast, whose face, otherwise comely enough, was marred by a look of hardened devilry, and who showed by a decided black eye that she had but recently been engaged in a personal encounter.

‘I’ll Lois you!’ repeated she fiercely. ‘By —— I’ll teach you to follow when yer aint wanted!’

‘Vere’s the rum, Kitty?’ cried a dirty, black-haired, dwarfish man, with a most repulsive countenance, who suddenly rushed from the house. ‘Where’s the rum you —— slut! Vot d’yer mean by stoppin’ out all night yer good-for-nothing, lazy brute you, eh? I’ll teach yer!’ and he aimed a blow at her which her superior height enabled her easily to parry. He was continuing to pour forth a torrent of filthy abuse on her when he suddenly turned and saw Wilfrid.

‘They’re detectives!’ cried the woman. ‘They’ve bin follerin’ of me all the way from Waterloo Bridge, drat em! I aint done nothink!’

‘The gentleman has made a mistake,’ said Norton, coming forward with a droll look, and removing his hat with an enormous flourish and an extravagant bow. ‘He mistook the lady for another lady he knows, and wanted to find, so he followed the lady home. He begs to apologize to her for his stupidity. We both apologize.’

The woman burst into a shrill laugh. ‘You’re a rum little man, you are!’ cried she, quite appreciating his humour; but the dwarf was at first by no means disposed to take the affair in good part, and began a tirade in which ‘—blackgaards—follerin’ my wife—smash you—eyes. I’ll smash you, I will!’ were the most prominent expressions.

‘Smash me, will you?’ cried Wilfrid, who was already savage at his mistake. ‘We’ll see that!’ and he turned so fiercely on his opponent that the little wretch beat a hasty retreat into the doorway.

‘What are you about, stupid?’ cried Norton, seizing him by the coat tails. ‘Don’t you see that you have

given the gentleman just cause for anger by following this lady. Come away, you old owl !'

The woman again began to titter in high amusement at being called a lady, and Wilfrid burst out laughing in spite of himself. 'You're right !' cried he, 'It's all a mistake, my good woman ! You needn't be alarmed, I thought you were some one else whom I have been looking for. Let us be off, Norton.'

'Won't the gentlemen give us suthin' to drink their healths in?' whined the woman, putting on a smile that she meant to be fascinating.

Oakburne tossed her a sixpence which the little dwarf darting out vainly tried to take from her, but she speedily repulsed him with a good sound box on the ear that made him retreat with a volley of bad language to his den. Two or three more disreputable looking inhabitants of the court began to appear at their windows, and the two friends therefore made their way back without delay to the street, and adjourned to a restaurant in the Strand to get a cup of coffee.

'I'm very sorry, Norton, to have given you such a wild goose chase,' said Wilfrid. 'I'm a great fool, and you're the best natured fellow in the world. I shall give up this business. It's hopeless.'

'Do not give up,' replied the other, lighting a cigar, 'Only in future select your wild geese with more care.' 'I'm the unluckiest beggar in the world !' went on Oakburne, thoroughly disheartened. 'All I do turns out badly. I've a great mind to enlist and join some of those fine fellows we saw this morning. I'm fit for nothing but to be knocked on the head !'

'Nonsense, my boy !' says the other kindly. 'You're out of sorts, and want change as we've all been telling

you. You're sure to get the medal if you only give yourself a fair chance. Go home, have a change, and you'll come back as right as a trivet.'

'It's no good!' said the gloomy young fellow bitterly. 'It will always be the same. Some men are born to failure, and I am one of them;' and Norton found his friend excessively poor company that morning.

Nevertheless, his perseverance with regard to Lois was about to be rewarded sooner than he expected. That very evening Mrs Skibbers came to pay him a visit.

'I said I'd come if I found out anything,' was the somewhat abrupt greeting of that lady, 'and you see I stand by my word, don't I!'

Wilfrid informed her he was very glad to see her, and made her sit down, and, after recovering her breath, which seemed rather short, and wiping her red perspiring countenance with a silk pocket handkerchief of much the same hue, she told him that she had heard from Lois. 'The letter did my old man more good than all the doctor's stuffs,' said Mrs. Skibbers, and then entered into a somewhat lengthy digression to explain how her 'old man' had been 'driving a pilot' to Chalk Farm Station in foggy weather, when there were a lot of 'empty goodses' about, and how a collision had consequently taken place between the pilot engine and that of one of the empty goods trains, to the injury, which was happily not serious, of Mr. Skibbers; how it was all the fault of the signalmen; how everything was always 'put upon the drivers,' and how 'that dratted company was no better than a parcel of rascals,' &c. &c.

Wilfrid listened very patiently, and expressed his sympathy with Mrs. Skibbers in her domestic sorrow, and then the worthy woman gave him Lois's letter, which

merely consisted of a few lines to her friend, telling her that at last she had found a quiet happy home where she hoped to remain for a long time to come, and thanking her for all her kindness, which she should never forget.

‘But she does not say where it is! and there’s no date or address to tell one, is there, Mrs. Skibbers?’ said Wilfrid in some dismay.

‘No there aint! That’s the bother of it,’ says Mrs. Skibbers, rubbing her nose violently. ‘But its a nice letter, aint it? I thought as how I’d show it you.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Wilfrid, with a rueful smile. ‘But stay, have you got the envelope?’

‘The what?’ enquired she, staring blankly at him.

‘The cover you know. What it came in. The cover with the stamp on it.’

‘The kiver, oh, ah! To be sure! the paper kiver!’ and, after a good deal of fumbling, she produced a greasy envelope, the examination of which shewed Wilfrid where it had been posted.

‘Ah! I know where she is!’ cried he joyfully, and then he explained to Mrs. Skibbers how Lois must have taken refuge, as the reader knows she had, with her aunt at Rolhill. The good creature was delighted at the news, and at Wilfrid’s intense sagacity in finding out where the letter had come from. She made him write down the address in order that she might send Lois an answer, though she was, as she said, but ‘a pore schollard,’ and it would take her ‘a deal of time.’ Then after telling Wilfrid that she thought he was ‘a proper sort of feller, a good feller,’ and wishing him ‘the best of luck,’ she asked leave to ‘shake him by the hand,’ and departed, charging him with many messages to Lois

and to her brother-in-law, the Skibbers at Lidfield, 'if you should per'aps see un, sir, and I might make so bold.'

This discovery made Wilfrid resolve to return home at once, and he accordingly took his departure for Lidfield next morning to the envy of Norton, who gave much good advice as to his health, and bade him not forget to give his kindest remembrances to Mrs. Oakburne and his sister.

Both his mother and Ethel were delighted to see him, and combined in their affectionate efforts to make his little visit as happy to him as possible. They sympathised with his disappointment with regard to Miss Elkfield, towards whom these ardent partisans now developed a strong animosity; they predicted his brilliant success in the approaching examinations; and they constantly assured him that the scandal about Lois was now quite forgotten, and that his character was quite cleared from all the false imputations which had been made against it. On this latter point, however, they were mistaken, as Wilfrid was shortly to learn.

One of his first cares after his return was to visit Mr. Simcox with the view of telling him how he had learnt that his daughter was at Rolhill. He had called at his house the morning after his arrival, and finding him out had strolled into the ash wood above the Elkfield's house, where, as the reader has learnt, he was able to save Walter Chessington from what might have been a nasty accident. He went home feeling very bitter against Beatrice and her *fiancée* after this meeting, which had been anything but pleasant to him, and when on going again to the schoolmaster's cottage that afternoon he found Miss Elkfield's pony carriage standing at the gate,

--for she had lost no time in fulfilling her promise to Lois,—he retreated at once. When he returned next morning he was mortified to learn that Mr. Simcox had gone out for the day,—the woman who was taking care of the cottage did not know where, or he would have learnt that it was to Rolhill,—and would not be back till late. He therefore had to content himself with leaving a note for the schoolmaster, and the day following all his time was occupied by a visit which he paid in company with his mother and sister to Mr. Bolderwood of Slopley, a cousin of Mrs. Oakburne's. The intercourse between the relations was somewhat limited, both because Slopley was a long way off, and also from the fact that there had been rather an interruption in their friendly relations when Wilfrid's mother, who had at one time refused an offer from this very cousin, married Dr. Oakburne. The latter was all very well, and quite a gentleman, but it was felt that his profession somehow raised a little barrier which a Bolderwood of Slopley could only get over with an effort. Hence a few formal invitations to luncheon or dinner, and stiff ceremonial visits three or four times a year, were the only mode in which the two households kept up their intimacy. Wilfrid went on this occasion solely to please his mother, who was, as has been said, proud of her descent and all that related to it, and was also proud of her own children, whose merits she loved to make known to her kinsmen and acquaintances. Old Mr. Bolderwood was a strong Tory and staunch supporter of Ferdinand Boarsby, while his nephew and heir, Captain Bolderwood, who had been at college with the latter, was if possible still more zealous in his cause. The Captain, who was always very cordial with his relatives, and especially with Wilfrid, denounced Walter Chessington

as an unprincipled advocate of revolutionary doctrines, deplored his engagement to Miss Elkfield,—towards whom, as has been mentioned, he had at one time himself been rather marked in his attentions,—as a calamity for the neighbourhood, and pretty well succeeded in convincing them that the return of the Liberal candidate would be a most terrible misfortune not only for the county, but for Great Britain. ‘A perfect stranger like that,’ said he; ‘it’s shockin’, upon my word! A piece of audacity that’s perfectly astoundin’, by jove! It’s just the sort of thing that would have been denounced as jobbery and pocket borough business if *wed* done it, eh, Wilfrid? I tell you the man’s a mere creature of that dreadful old woman Lady Thistledale. And for a mere outsider like that they oust a representative man like Ferdinand Boarsby, who is most wonderfully clever, and whose family is as old as the hills, and has been the life of the county—positively the life of the county! It’s monstrous, and if men like this fellow Chessington are to be returned to Parliament, the ruin of the country is certain!—positively certain!—not a doubt of it, eh, Julia?’ So it fell out that, after listening to a series of discourses delivered in this strain on the merits and demerits of the rival candidates. Mrs. Oakburne, at the end of a visit, which was pleasant enough, but occupied the best part of the day, drove out of her kinsman’s park, at Slopley, firmly impressed with the conviction that the future of England depended upon Ferdinand Boarsby’s being returned member for Lidfield. This led her to purchase a large supply of the Tory colours, and to induce Wilfrid and her daughter, who had been fully persuaded into the same way of thinking, to decorate themselves with rosettes of the same; and the next morning her anxiety

to find out the state of the poll was such as to make her ask her son to go down into the town after luncheon and bring them back a full report on the subject. Wilfrid's interest was not by any means so keen as her own, but still he had quite sufficient sympathy with the success of Boarsby's cause to make him glad to do so. He had been very busy all the morning writing letters and filling up certain forms in connection with his coming examinations, and as in three days he would have to return to London he thought it would be an opportunity, which he could not afford to lose, of making another attempt to see Mr. Simcox, who had not yet returned an answer to his note. If he failed he determined to walk over to Rolhill himself on the morrow, and make enquiries for Lois. So he donned his colours, armed himself with a thick stick, and set out.

The principal polling station was close to the town hall, which was a quaint old-fashioned edifice, raised on four ancient stone pillars, under which the nucleus of the market was wont to be stationed. The streets were gay with flags, and thronged with the supporters of both parties, all wearing colours, and all more or less noisy and demonstrative. The Borough of Lidfield included four outlying hamlets besides the town itself, and two continuous streams of coming and departing voters kept steadily moving up and down the main street, interchanging comments, chiefly of an offensive or at least *chaffy* nature, with the little bands of townspeople, most of whom had polled early. Nearly all the tradespeople had prudently closed their shops, and most of the crowd were clad in their best garments, so that the whole place wore a holiday appearance, and the throng, the gay colours, and the groups round the polling booth in the market place,

which was bright with flags and coloured placards, made the picturesque old town a good study for a painter. So thought Wilfrid as he made his way to the polling station, where he learnt that Chessington was a little ahead of his rival, but that the latter had been gaining steadily during the last hour. He noticed several people he knew hovering around the market place. Lord Ashleigh, dressed in deep mourning, and his 'future connection,' Mr. Elkfield, were there. So was the rector, who was a strong conservative, and was talking to Dr. Dosey, who wore the same colours. Captain Bolderwood was riding about on a serviceable cab, in company with a younger brother of Ferdinand Boarsby,—he eventually married one of Boarsby's sisters—and gave Wilfrid a kindly nod of recognition. Snipington of Marshmire Park was conspicuous for his large rosette of the Liberal colours and the bunches of ribbons of the same hue with which he had adorned his mare, for, to the great disgust of his mother and sisters who were very intimate with the Boarsbys, his friendship for the Elkfields, which had even survived Beatrice's engagement, led him, having no particular opinions of his own, to give his vote to Walter Chessington. These were all on the side of the market-place nearest to the church, which was comparatively quiet and more retired than the others. Wilfrid passed under the hall after learning the result, and as he crossed the crowded, open space beyond he caught sight of Portal mounted on a wiry-looking bay mare.

'You're on the wrong side I see, Oakburne!' cried the latter. He had been doing yeoman's service all day in marshalling the supporters of his candidate, for, though he now bore the latter no love after his engagement to Miss

Elkfield, he was quite determined that he should win for the sake of his professional reputation. 'I suppose you are not here for long?' added he, riding a little way with him.

'No!' answered Oakburne. 'I return to London the day after to-morrow!'

Groups of rough-looking men, some with the liberal, and some with the conservative colours, most of them more or less the worse for liquor, and all armed with sticks, were dotted here and there over the broad square, now chatting among themselves, now interchanging noisy abuse with their rivals, but in all cases ready for any mischief. Portal turned aside to address some order to a man in one of these and, as he did so, a couple of ill-conditioned fellows, who wore Boarsby's colours, came up to Wilfrid.

'Cap'n Bolderwood, sir!' said one of them, a big rough-looking drover, who was evidently more than half-drunk, 'Cap'n Bolderwood, sir! I've been *working*!' and he laid his hand on Wilfrid's shoulder.

'Get out!' cried Oakburne, shaking him off. 'I'm not Captain Bolderwood.'

'Give me a shilling, or I'll *kill* you!' cried the fellow, staggering up to him again, and grasping his coat. 'I will kill you if yoush don' giv m' half-a-crownsh.'

Wilfrid gave him a push which sent him sprawling, and those around burst into a rude laugh.

'What d'ye mean by knocking my mate about? you!' cried the other, a smaller man who was rather more sober. 'What d'ye mean!' repeated he with an oath, squaring up at Oakburne. 'A pretty fellow you are to serve one of your own side so, you Oakburne!'

'It was his own fault,' cried Wilfrid, enraged at his

impudence, and surprised at being addressed by name. 'Why did he get in my way if he's one of my side? Look here, if you don't move, I'll serve you in the same way too. Ha! take in then!' and, as the man defiantly aimed a blow at him with his stick, he suited the action to the word, and with a blow of his fist knocked him down amid the jeers of the spectators. The man lay for a moment on the rough uneven stones, then, suddenly springing to his feet, he advanced threateningly towards Oakburne.

'Ah! I know you!' cried he fiercely, shaking his fist at him. 'I know you! You are the young Oakburne who ruined old Simcox's daughter! You ought to be flogged, you ought! I say lads, this is the man that ruined Lois Simcox, and took her away from Lidfield, and broke her father's heart.'

'Its a lie!' cried Wilfrid turning pale, and trembling with suppressed rage.

'Ah! look at his face! He's the man!' cried his antagonist, as a crowd of roughs gathered round. 'He's the man, I say.'

'Yes! he is! He's the man!' echoed the crowd. 'Shame on him! shame!'

'Down the river with him!' cried his first assailant, with drunken fury. 'Down'sh river'sh with him!' and the cry was eagerly taken up by the assembled mob.

'This is a false lie! a d—— lie!' cried Wilfrid, clearing a space round him with his stick. 'Portal I appeal to you. Is this not a lie from beginning to end?'

'How can I say!' answered Portal, who had grown very white. 'Let him answer for himself' he said in a rather tremulous voice,

'That's right Mr. Portal!' cried the crowd. 'Leave him alone! Leave him alone!'

'You coward! you know its false!' cried Wilfrid getting desperate.

'What do you mean you impudent brute! For all I know, it may be true!' answered Portal angrily. He could not stand being called a coward in public.

'That's right! He's the man! Down the river with him! Down the river with him!' was the cry from a hundred hoarse voices.

'No! no! He *arnt* the man! I say he *arnt* the man!' cried a loud harsh voice. 'He saved the girl's life! He's not the man, Oakburne is'nt!'

'You be quiet, Skibbers!' said some one.

'I say it's a shame! He arnt the man!' repeated Skibbers loudly. 'I helped him to pull her out of the water myself. His dad was Doctor Oakburne what got my missus and babbies through the scarlet fee-ayver! You helped me, Bill Parrott, to pull 'em out. You know you did!'

A jeer of disbelief burst from the crowd, who had not enjoyed the satisfaction of ducking anyone for many a year now, and did not intend to be thus balked of their pleasure.

'Dont you say nothink, Skibbers!' said Bill Parrott. 'It aint no manner of good now. It'll only make it worse for him. We'll help get him out.'

'I'll run and tell old Simcox, damn'd if I don't!' cried Skibbers, who was of course the brother-in-law of Wilfrid's friend of Bede Street, Euston Road. 'I arnt goin' to stand this!' and off he darted up the street.

No one noticed him save his friend Parrott, for the crowd were intent on their sport. 'Down the river with

him !' they roared, and in a moment half a dozen pair of strong hands seized and pinioned Wilfrid, who managed to give and receive some ugly blows during the process, and bore him towards the river.

'Perhaps I'd better go and see that no real mischief is done, or I might be held responsible !' said Portal to himself. 'But this will be useful to me ; very useful !' and he put his horse into motion and followed on the skirts of the yelling rabble, who moved on with reiterated cries of 'Drown him ! Duck him ! Down the river with him !' Many of them believed that they were really punishing an offender, and those who did not enjoyed the fun as only an English crowd—one of the most savage of all crowds—can.

Up the long High Street, past the hospital and the rectory, swept the mob, and then turned into the little lane leading to the river, in which the schoolmaster's house stood. As they neared it, however, the progress of those who were carrying Oakburne was brought to a sudden stand-still, for a woman darted into the centre of road, and, standing full in front of them, cried, 'Stop ! In Heaven's name stop ! I am Lois Simcox ; I command you to stop !'

The suddenness of her appearance, her clear ringing voice, her pale, beautiful face, and above all the defiant courage in her tones made the rough mob halt abruptly in silent wonder as if in obedience to her words ; and, as they did so, her father, with his grey hair streaming in the wind, and honest Skibbers, still hot and panting with his exertions, came and stood beside her, and formed a barrier in the path of Wilfrid's persecutors.

'Aye ! It's her sure ! 'Tis true ! 'Tis her ! That's

right!' cried several voices. 'That's Lois Simcox! That's the schoolmaster's girl!'

'Hear me!' cried she, quickly seizing the advantage she had gained; 'Hear me! you are doing a cruel wrong!'

The crowd was now tightly wedged in the narrow way. In the front rank were Wilfrid and his bearers, and hearing Lois's voice, and profiting by the astonishment of his captors, he struggled to his feet and stood pale and bleeding before them all. Not far from him on the right was Portal on his horse, who unwillingly enough found himself also thus forced forward into a prominent position. On seeing Lois his face immediately showed signs of dismay, and he looked back as if to see whether he could not retreat. The dense mass behind him, however, made this quite impossible, and he was fain to remain an unwilling spectator of the scene, looking to any new comer like the leader of the crowd.

'What do you want there, d—— you? What d'ye mean spoilin' sport, woman? Move off! Out of the way there!' began some of the fiercer of those in the back ranks of the mob, but their cries were not taken up by those in front, and Lois, taking no heed of them, cried out again in a voice that at once rivetted attention:—

'You are doing a cruel wrong, I say! This man, Wilfrid Oakburne, never harmed me. He saved my life. He has been my best friend. Yes, my best friend! He has tried to bring me home to my father. You all know me——'

'Aye, aye, that's true! We know you, Lois!' cried the crowd.

'What I say is true, God help me! Wilfrid Oakburne never injured me. Look! There sits the man who ruined me—who, on pretence of marriage, wrought my shame,

who turned my life into a hell, and drove me from my father, from my home ! Aye, you, Raymond Portal, who sit there quietly looking on at the persecution of the man who has unjustly had to bear the stain which you wear in your soul ! You ! false, lying, coward ! who robbed me of my innocence, and now allow the innocent to suffer for your guilt ! Look at him, you men ! His guilt is written in his face, look !

All eyes were now turned towards Portal who, with downcast eyes, and his pale face convulsed with alternate shame, fear, and anger, sat looking the incarnation of a convicted criminal. He motioned with his arm as if about to speak, but though his dry lips moved, no sound issued from them. Then, as a low murmur rose among the crowd, which gradually deepened to a roar of fury, with a strange cry, that was half a groan and half a shout of defiance, he drove his spurs into his horse's flanks, and, giving her a furious cut with his whip, dashed madly past the trio in front of him, hurling poor Skibbers to the ground.

A howl of disappointed rage broke from the mob as they saw their intended victim make good his escape. Some would have rushed after him in vain pursuit, had not Lois again suddenly arrested all attention.

'Do you believe me now ?' she cried, in a voice suddenly weaker and more tremulous, laying her hand on her father's shoulder for support. 'Do you believe me ? I swear by heaven I have told you all the truth,—aye even to my shame !'

There was a moment's silence, and then a great shout of 'It is true ! it is true !' rent the air, and the fickle mob burst into hearty cheers for Lois Simcox.

‘Good heavens!’ cried Wilfrid, running forward, ‘she is ill! she has fainted!’

A sudden fit of coughing seized her as she strove once more to speak. She tottered forward a few paces, and then fell prone on the earth, and a thin stream of blood trickled from her parted lips. Oakburne, aided by her father, bore her senseless form into the house, leaving the excited crowd, full of wonder and pity, to disperse and carry back with them to the town the report of the strange spectacle they had witnessed.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Funeral and a Wedding.

Oh hearts that break and give no sign
Save whitening lip and fading tresses,
Till death pours out his cordial wine,
Slow-dropped from Misery's crushing presses,—
If singing breath or echoing chord
To every hidden pang were given,
What endless melodies were poured,
As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven !—O. W. HOLMES.

There is one very sad thing in old friendships, to every mind that is really moving onward. It is this : that one cannot help using his early friends as the seaman uses the log, to mark his progress.—

O. W. HOLMES.



HE bells were ringing, and the crowds huzzaing, because the Liberals had gained a great victory.

While Walter Chessington, from a commanding but uncomfortable position on the roof of the 'White Elephant Hotel,' was thanking the electors of Lidfield for the honour they had done him in returning him as their representative to Parliament, and declaring that 'to watch *their* interest and devote himself to the fulfilment of his duties as *their* representative would be the first object of his life,' poor Ferdinand Boarsby, from the balcony of the 'Boarsby Arms,' was also thanking his supporters for 'the staunch and devoted

aid they had given him in fighting this battle for the cause of conservatism,—a battle he meant to fight again on the first opportunity, now that he was assured that he could rely on such disinterested and loyal help, a help which made even defeat more bearable.’ Neither the successful nor unsuccessful candidate, we may be sure, forgot to state what a satisfaction it had been that ‘this contest had been throughout conducted in such an honourable, such a thoroughly straightforward and gentlemanly manner’ by his opponent; and the faithful adherents of both, it is equally certain, did not forget to drink in oft repeated bumpers the health of their respective champions. Cheering, music, wine, and jollity, were paramount everywhere throughout the town, and all this while poor Lois Simcox lay dying. The crowd had quite forgotten all about her and her wrongs, about Portal and about Oakburne. Her father, Wilfrid, and the doctor, who watched beside her bedside, seemed now the only people in the world who knew of or cared for the existence of one who a few hours before had been for a brief space, a popular heroine.

Wilfrid’s professional experience told him at once, and the doctor confirmed his opinion, that she was in an advanced state of consumption, brought on through the mental and bodily suffering she had undergone. Her exertions when interfering on Wilfrid’s behalf had ruptured a blood vessel, and the mischief must, it was to be feared, prove fatal in her weak and over-wrought state. All the skill, care, and time, that his natural kindliness of disposition led the doctor to devote to the case proved unavailing, and his prognostications turned out only too true. Fever with delirium set in in the course of the night, and for the next two days quite prostrated the poor sufferer,

whose wanderings of mind were most painful to listen to. At one time she could not bear her father to approach her ; at another she implored him to come and save her from shame. Then her fancy would carry her back to her childhood, and she would imagine herself playing with Beatrice in the Elkfield's garden ; or she would imagine herself to be wandering by the Lidd with Wilfrid, addressing him in terms which showed her real affection for him, when suddenly she would beg him piteously to rescue her from some one who was pursuing her, and these dreams always ended with shrieks and cries that she was drowning, after which her moans and struggling would suddenly cease, and she would murmur 'Saved ! saved !' and pass into a state of unconsciousness.

During this period, Wilfrid, who gave up for the present his idea of returning to London, and whose mother and sister fully sympathised with his motives, constantly visited the house, and he then learnt for the first time many details of this sad history which had hitherto been unknown to him. Poor Mr. Simcox, whose grief and anxiety were pitiful to witness, seemed to find some relief in talking to and confiding in him. He told him how he had learnt from Beatrice Elkfield that his daughter was at Rolhill, and how he had gone the next day to visit her ; how happy and yet how painful to both their interview had been, and how she had told him everything. He had then learnt, he said, for the first time, that Portal had betrayed poor Lois under a solemn promise of marriage evidenced by some dozen letters. He had, it appeared, renewed this promise on the birth of her baby, on condition that she would go to London and wait there till he was in a position to fulfil it. She had, therefore, left home with money supplied

by him, only to learn on reaching London that he had deliberately deceived her, and that he now cast her off for ever. Her sufferings after this, the death of her baby and her painful journey to Rolhill; all these she had related at length to her father. She had also told him of Wilfrid's offer to marry her, and how Portal, after Oakburne had saved her life, had tried to induce her by every means in his power, to make use of the latter's inexperience to lead him on to make her his wife, and thus at once screen herself from shame, and rid her seducer of the victim of whom he had grown weary. It was plain, her father said,—he could hardly mention the man's name without expressions of the most intense loathing and anger,—that Lois had loved Portal very deeply, and that he had almost to the end retained a fatal influence over her, but that after her attempt to commit suicide, this feeling had changed to one of bitter, almost dangerous hatred, and that she then only clung to him in the vain hope that he might at last be induced to keep his promise and marry her. Wilfrid's saving her from self-destruction, and his evident admiration and friendship for her, had kindled in the poor thing a love almost amounting to worship. It had, she told her father, reawakened all the good that was left in her, had helped her to struggle to pray and repent, and had kept her from falling into utter depths of hopeless ruin in London, when she had first learnt from Portal that he would have nothing more to do with her, and had left her to live or die as she best could. When she had heard from Beatrice Elkfield and her father how he, Wilfrid, had been bearing Portal's burden of well merited infamy, her anger and affection had been so strongly roused, that she had come into Lidfield, against her

father's wish, for the express purpose of seeking out Portal, and either compelling him to acknowledge his guilt, or publicly denouncing him. When, with this resolution in her heart, she had suddenly learnt from the worthy Skibbers (who, as the schoolmaster said, burst upon them breathless and almost speechless with indignation and anxiety), how Wilfrid was being dragged past their cottage by the mob as a punishment for his supposed crime, she had gone out in spite of all remonstrances and acted as the reader has already learnt.

'All seemed so happy again!' said the poor father. 'All was going on so well! I was going to have left this, and lived with her at Rolhill. She seemed so hopeful once more, once more like the Lois of old, the little daughter I nursed and cherished, and now—and now—' and he fairly broke down.

When Wilfrid arrived next morning, a lady was coming out of the little sitting-room as he entered the passage. It was Beatrice Elkfield, who started back when she saw him. She was crying, and looked very pale and agitated. 'Wilfrid!' she said, 'She is dying! She wants to see you again! And—and, Wilfrid, will you forgive me!'

'Beatrice! You know you need not ask that!' he cried. As he grasped the hand that she extended to him Mr. Simcox came out to them. 'She is asking for you!' said the poor father. 'It is for the last time!' and Oakburne silently followed him into the room.

As he looked on the wasted figure, the lovely face which wore that transparent palor that consumption gives to its victims, and the bright wistful eyes which looked up so tenderly into his, he felt he was looking for the last time on one who loved

him as he could never hope to be loved again on this earth, and that he had never realised the extent of that love till now. His tears fell fast as he silently took her hand in his, and he forgot all else save the presence of the dying woman.

‘Wilfrid!’ whispered she, ‘I want to say good-bye to you.’

‘Ah! Lois! Lois darling!’ cried he passionately, ‘you must not die! you must not die.’

‘Hush!’ said she gently. ‘It is better so! I am not sorry or frightened now. Kiss me once more, dear.’

A moment after she had said the words a sudden change came over her face. ‘Father! Father!’ she cried; and as the schoolmaster with broken utterances of mingled sorrow and affection, came and knelt beside her, she placed her arms round his neck.

‘Saved! saved!’ she murmured, and her spirit passed away.

In accordance with a wish expressed shortly before her death, Lois was buried at Rolhill, and as Wilfrid, in company with her father and uncle, neared the quiet churchyard on the down, three persons, dressed in deep mourning, were seen to be already waiting there, who proved to be the two brothers Skibbers, and the wife of the one employed on the railway, who had shown so much kindness to poor Lois when she was in London. The worthy couple, learning from their brother what had occurred, had managed to obtain a free pass down the line, and had given up a whole day on purpose to attend the funeral.

When the service was over Mr. Whitworth, pleased

and touched by this token of respect to his niece on the part of strangers, and especially by the genuine grief of Mrs. Skibbers, made the two rest awhile at his house, where Mr Simcox had arranged to stay for the night, and so Wilfrid went home on foot alone. A pleasant breeze was blowing, the blue sky was dappled with white fleecy clouds, and the country on either side of the pleasant hills was beginning to show the tender green tints of spring. Unbroken silence reigned around him, and as he turned and looked back towards the lonely church, and watched for a moment the 'waves of shadow' sweep over the sunny hillside, he felt that no fairer spot could have been chosen for the last resting place of poor, ill-fated Lois Simcox. A flood of solemn thoughts rose in his heart as he recalled the events of the past year, which that distant grave had now severed as it were from the rest of his life, and of which it would henceforth form a solemn monument. He went on his way homewards, feeling that life had of a sudden changed for him in all its aspects, and that he could look back on the past as a period, fruitful indeed in matter for grief and self reproach, and in hard lessons of self government, but as something which now appeared by some mysterious influence almost to have ceased to form a portion of his existence.

'Our brains,' says the American writer, whose verses form the heading to this chapter, 'are seventy year clocks. The Angel of Life winds them up at once for all, then closes the case, and gives the key into the hand of the Angel of the Resurrection. Tic—tac! tic—tac! go the wheels of thought; our will cannot stop them; they cannot stop themselves; sleep cannot still them; madness only makes them go faster; death alone can break into the case, and, seizing the ever-swinging pendulum, which

we call the heart, silence at last the clicking of the terrible escapement we have carried so long beneath our wrinkled foreheads.' There are few who have not at one time or another realised this, and who have not striven by study, business, or pleasure, to control the never-ceasing flow of thought. Wilfrid fled to his studies as a refuge from himself, and he was not slow to reap the reward of his unceasing labours. His mother and sister would have had him give up his examination and remain at home for a time, and he was the more tempted to do so by the fact that, now that the true story of poor Lois Simcox's troubles was known, people at Lidfield seemed disposed to try and make up by a good deal of kindly notice for their past hard treatment of him. Setting his face, however, against all such seductive influences, he returned to London and set to work in such good earnest that he not only gained the prize medal which he competed for, but acquitted himself so well that, after having obtained his doctor's degree some months later in the summer, he was appointed to a very good subordinate post at St. Christophers Hospital, with the understanding that the authorities had still better things in store for him if he would stop on.

One morning in the middle of April, just after gaining his prize, as he was reading the *Times*,—which, now that war with Russia had been really declared, every one who could do so studied with avidity,—he happened to glance over the first column, and saw there a notice which he could not help reading with a little emotion. It was the announcement of the marriage 'on the 7th April at the Parish Church Lidfield, of Walter Horace Chessington, M.P., of Otterstone Hall, Clayshire, to Beatrice, only daughter of Joseph Elkfield, J.P., of Ashdene House,

Lidfield, Hillshire ;' and the day after he received from home a copy of the *Hillshire Post* giving a full account of the ceremony.

Wilfrid read it all with rather mingled feelings. He had not seen Beatrice again after their meeting at the deathbed of poor Lois, and since that time he had felt that his passion for her was quite cured. Still he could not help feeling a good deal of bitterness as he thought how he had loved this young lady, who had just been married with so much pomp and ceremony, and how tamely and sadly his courtship of her had ended. He little thought how soon, or under what strange circumstances, he would again meet Beatrice and her husband, or how closely their fortunes were destined to be bound up with those of some of his relatives and friends.







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